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NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS

ImagineFX PRESENTS

COMIC ARTIST

Welcome to the Comic Artist collection, packed with stunning pieces of art to inspire you, professional artist Q&As filled with tips and tricks to help you improve your own art, features and interviews that offer vital lessons, and in-depth step-by-step workshops to work along with. With Black Panther, Wonder Woman and Thor leading the charge, this collection is set to be something really special. Whether you're familiar with the industry standard software Photoshop, or you want to take your first steps in an affordable alternative, there's plenty here to get you started along the right path. And with expert tips on narrative and depicting characters in your art, there really has never been a better guide for everyone and anyone that is interested in the art of creating comics!



FUTURE

COMIC ARTIST

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NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS ImagineFX
bookazine series







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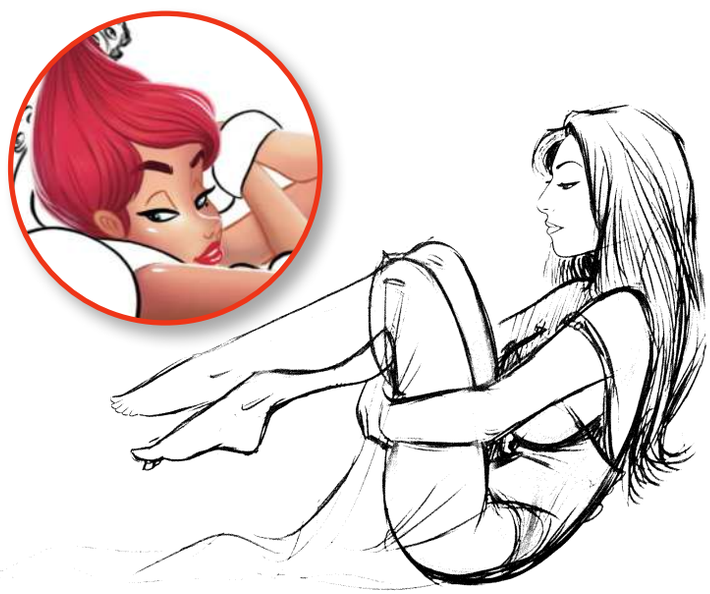
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GET YOUR RESOURCES

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COMIC ARTIST GALLERY

Amin Faramarzeyan
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Amin Faramarzeyan is a hard working and passionate illustrator who is always seeking himself in his art. He comes from a graphic design and animation background with more than 15 years of experience in graphic design, animation, game and advertising industry.





Choirul Abidin (ArtBidin)

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MEDIA: Photoshop

Since his childhood, Choirul Abidin has been drawing on paper, or anything that is still related to art. He worked in entertainment without direction until he met the comic studio in Malang City named X Kanopi studio.

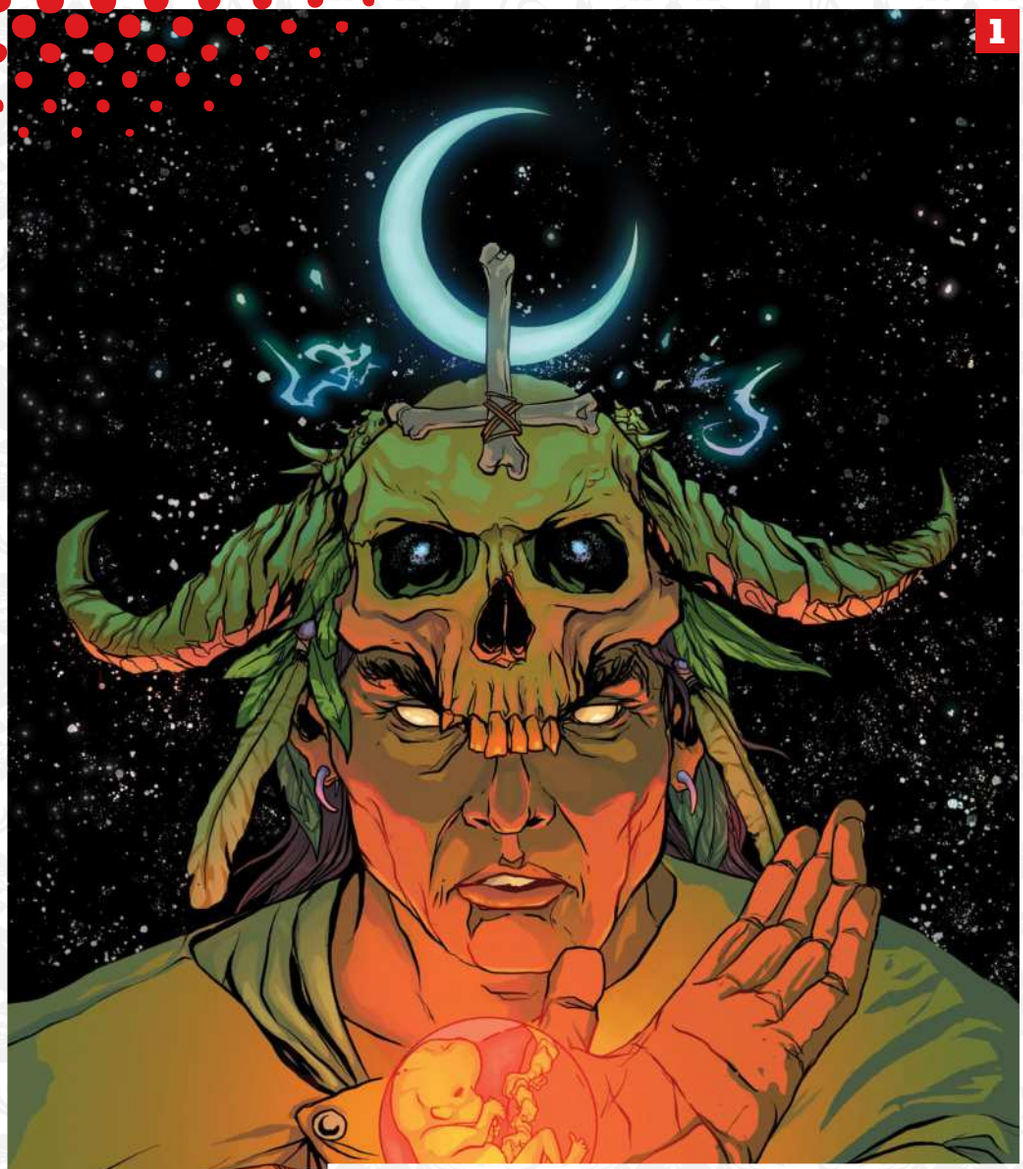




Benjamin Ee

LOCATION: Melbourne, Australia
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MEDIA: Photoshop

Benjamin Ee is an Australian illustrator and concept artist who enjoys working in a wide variety of industries and projects. He has a loud laugh, is a heavy sleeper, and plays games on easy.







Brittany Pezzillo

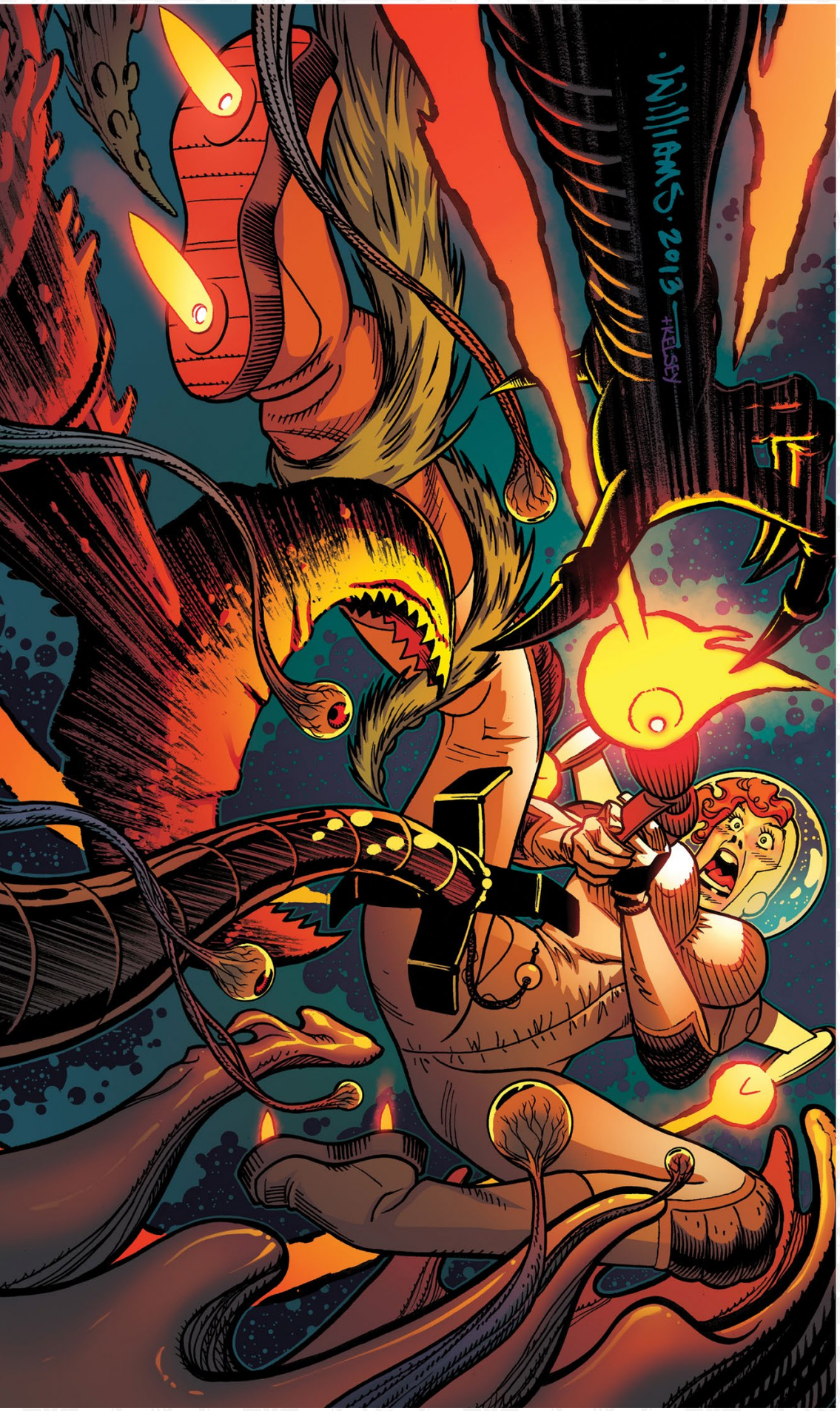
LOCATION: Philadelphia, PA (USA)
WEB: brittanypezzillo.com
EMAIL: pezzillo.brittany@gmail.com
MEDIA: Photoshop CS6, Clip Studio Paint, Pencil/Ink

Manufactured in 1987, Brittany is a fantasy illustrator and comic artist located in the greater Philadelphia area. They graduated The Kubert School in 2013 and have worked as a colourist for Marvel, Dynamite Comics and Egmont. They also produce creator-owned lowbrow **IndieComix.net** in collaboration with other industry chums.

Fresh off a recent card game project, they are currently working on a personal five-painting series and colouring *Bettie Page* and *Evil Ernie: Godeater* for Dynamite Comics.

1 BIRTHRIGHT OF THE SHAMAN
"This is a cool special edition print I cooked up for *Legend of the Spaceborne Killer*, a comic book written by Brandon Yeagley of Crobot and published through Pro Hobo Comics. I was a colourist on the book and it was a ton of fun. The shaman is my favourite character to draw from the book so I took a crack at him for our crowdfunding prize!"

2 TRUE FUTURE PAGES 2 AND 4
"*True Future* is a collection of supernatural stories, this one is about a host of sentient paramecium escaping a desolate post-human Earth. You know, typical Tuesday things. They were done as a team effort by Max Fuchs and I, with him on pencils and inks and me rocking the colours."



David Williams

LOCATION: Albuquerque, New Mexico (USA)
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EMAIL: dwams9495@aol.com
MEDIA: Pen and Ink, Photoshop color by Kelsey Shannon

David Williams is a consummate professional and has been working in the comics and animation industries as an artist for nearly 30 years. The legendary Dave Stevens helped David break into the mainstream comic book world in 1990 at DC Comics, where his work first appeared in *Who's Who Jaguar, Robin, and Legends of the Dark Knight* for DC (among other projects). He also has a lengthy Marvel resume, including *Hulk & Power Pack, Wolverine: First Class*, and the more recent *X-Force, A+X*, and *Spider-Verse* titles.

He also worked for various animation studios, including WB, Sony, and Cartoon Network. David has the prestigious credits of working on *Batman: The Animated Series, Superman: The Animated Series*, and *Ben 10* on his resume. This work also led him to WB Consumer Products, where he was a senior character artist for nearly a decade. He still continues to work in comics,animation and consumer products to this day.

Derek Rodenbeck
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WEB: Ridingwiththewolves.com
EMAIL: derekrodenbeck@gmail.com
MEDIA: Traditional Ink and Photoshop

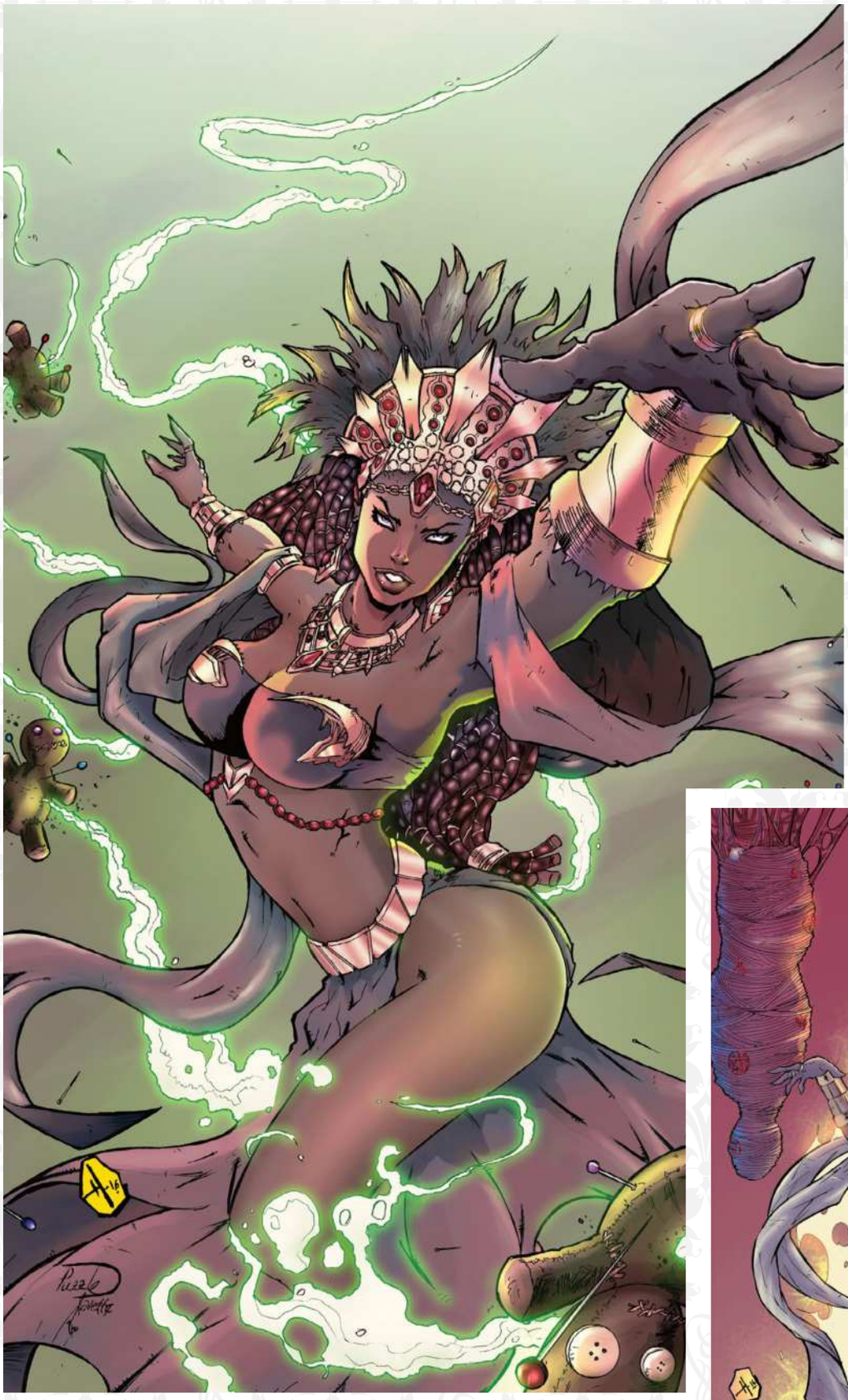
Derek Rodenbeck is an adventurer and Army vet who swapped military life to follow his dreams. He currently writes for Creative Live and shoots nature photography. He gets to experience some of the most beautiful places on Earth. People also mistake his dogs for bears. Lover of science, photography, and all things nerdy, join his journey on Instagram @**derekrodenbeck**.













Ibrahim Aydın

LOCATION: Aydin, Turkey
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MEDIA: Photoshop

Ibrahim Aydin is an artist based in Turkey, that thoroughly enjoys his job. He studied fine art for two years and would like to continue his studies in either the Philippines, Italy or Abu Dhabi. Working through difficult conditions, Ibrahim continues to do what he loves every day.



Maksim Strelkov

LOCATION: Varna, Bulgaria
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EMAIL: keepercomicsgeek@mail.ru
MEDIA: Photoshop

Maksim Strelkov, a life-long *Star Wars* comic and movie fan , discovered his love for colouring five years ago and began practising. In May 2013, he experienced a break-up with a girl and decided to practice harder to forget that. It was this experience that pushed him to ultimately become better man and colourist.





Tonton Revolver

LOCATION: London, England
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A French concept artist and illustrator currently based in London working at Rocksteady as a senior concept artist, Tonton created concepts covering many areas of game production including vehicles, characters, creatures, environments, weapons, since he was 14-years-old. His job is his passion and his childhood dream.

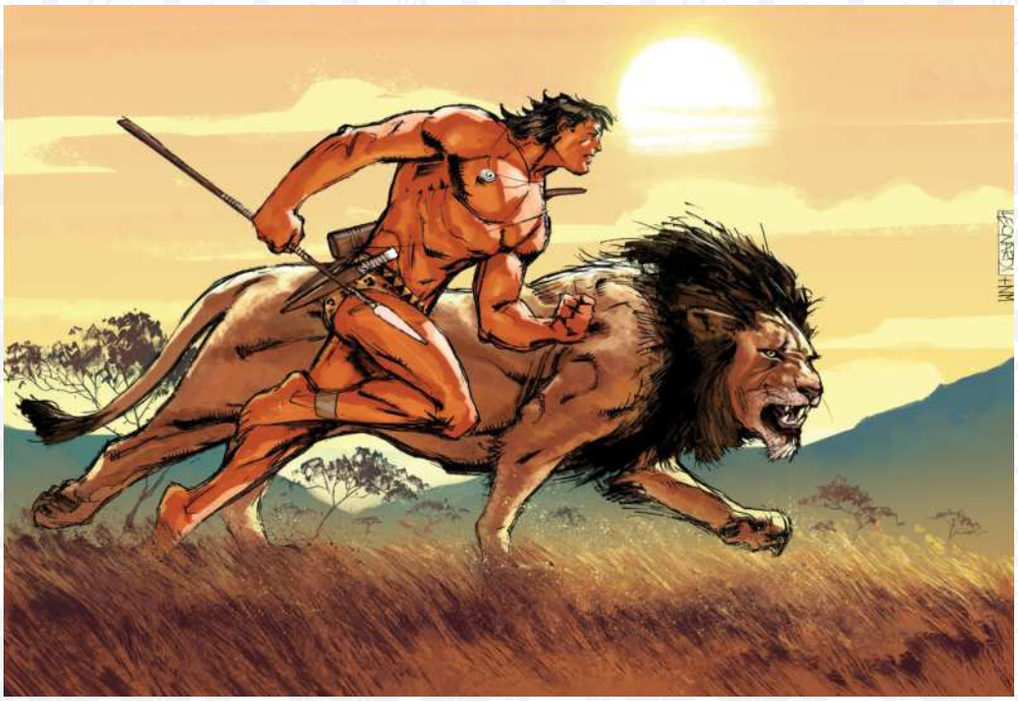


Max Fuchs

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MEDIA: Pen and Ink

Max Fuchs is an artist and educator living in Montclair, New Jersey. He has worked primarily in independent comics since graduating from the Kubert School in 2013, and has additionally worked in storyboarding, concept art, and arts education. His clients have included Image Comics, Pronto Comics, Time Inc., and Inner Station Comics.

In 2016, Max was honoured to return to the Kubert School as an instructor. He is currently working on the upcoming *Bram Stoker* series for Inner Station Comics, as well as his creator-owned series, *Scotch Bonnet*.

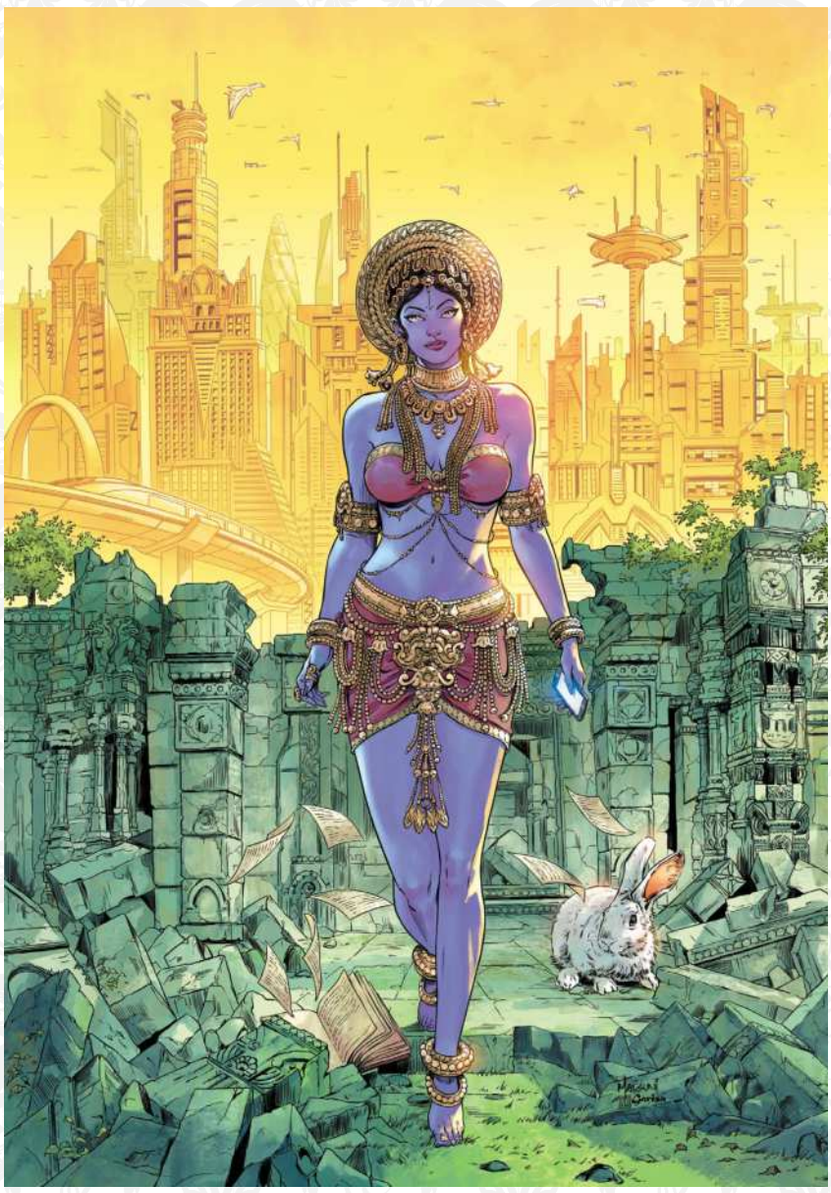


Neeraj Menon

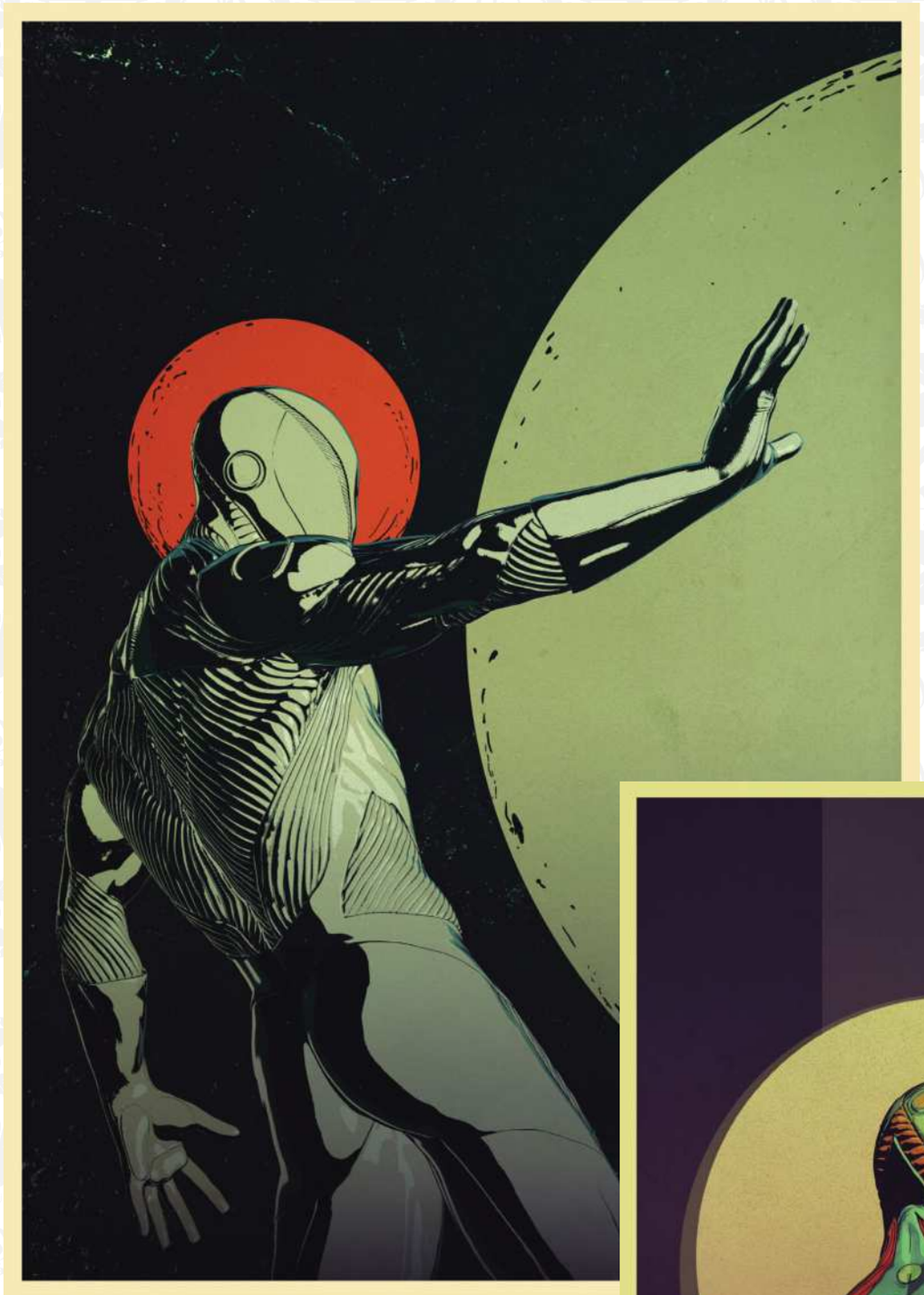
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Neeraj Menon is a freelance artist based in Pune, India. Having been exposed to comics and animation at a young age,it was only natural to pursue a career in the visual arts.

He now works as a concept artist and comic book colourist with clients and publishers worldwide.







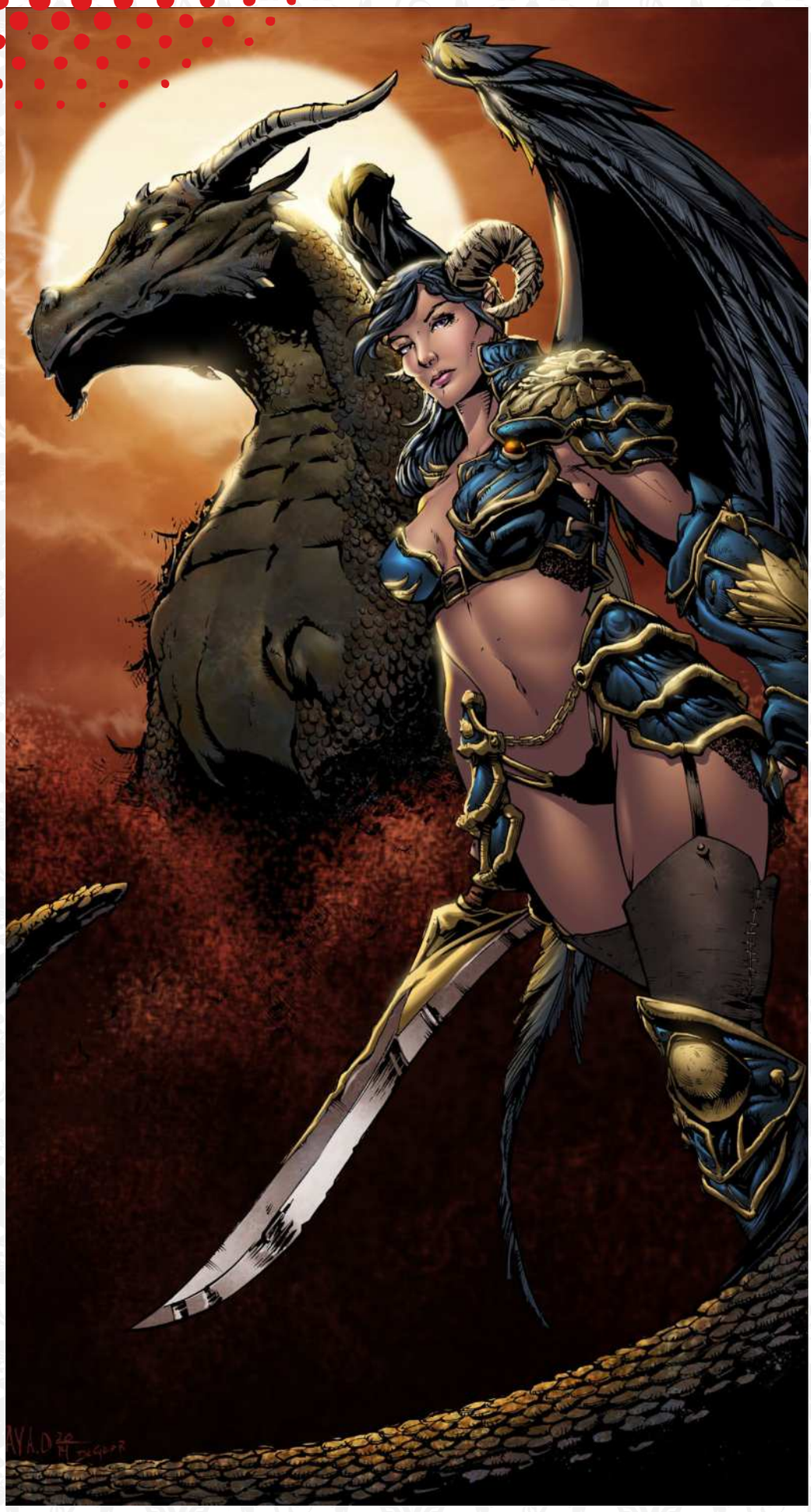
Pablo Muñoz Gómez

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MEDIA: ZBrush and Photoshop

Pablo Muñoz Gómez works as a concept artist and animator in Melbourne, Australia. He is also a seasonal 3D instructor, heavily involved with 3D sculpting and he runs the site **ZBrushGuides.com**







Sean Ellery

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MEDIA: Photoshop CS6, laptop... and a mouse

Sean is a high school teacher by day and began colouring comic art as a hobby in 2001. This has grown over time to the point where he now works as a regular cover colourist for Zenescope Entertainment. In the past he has also worked as an art refurbisher for Marvel.


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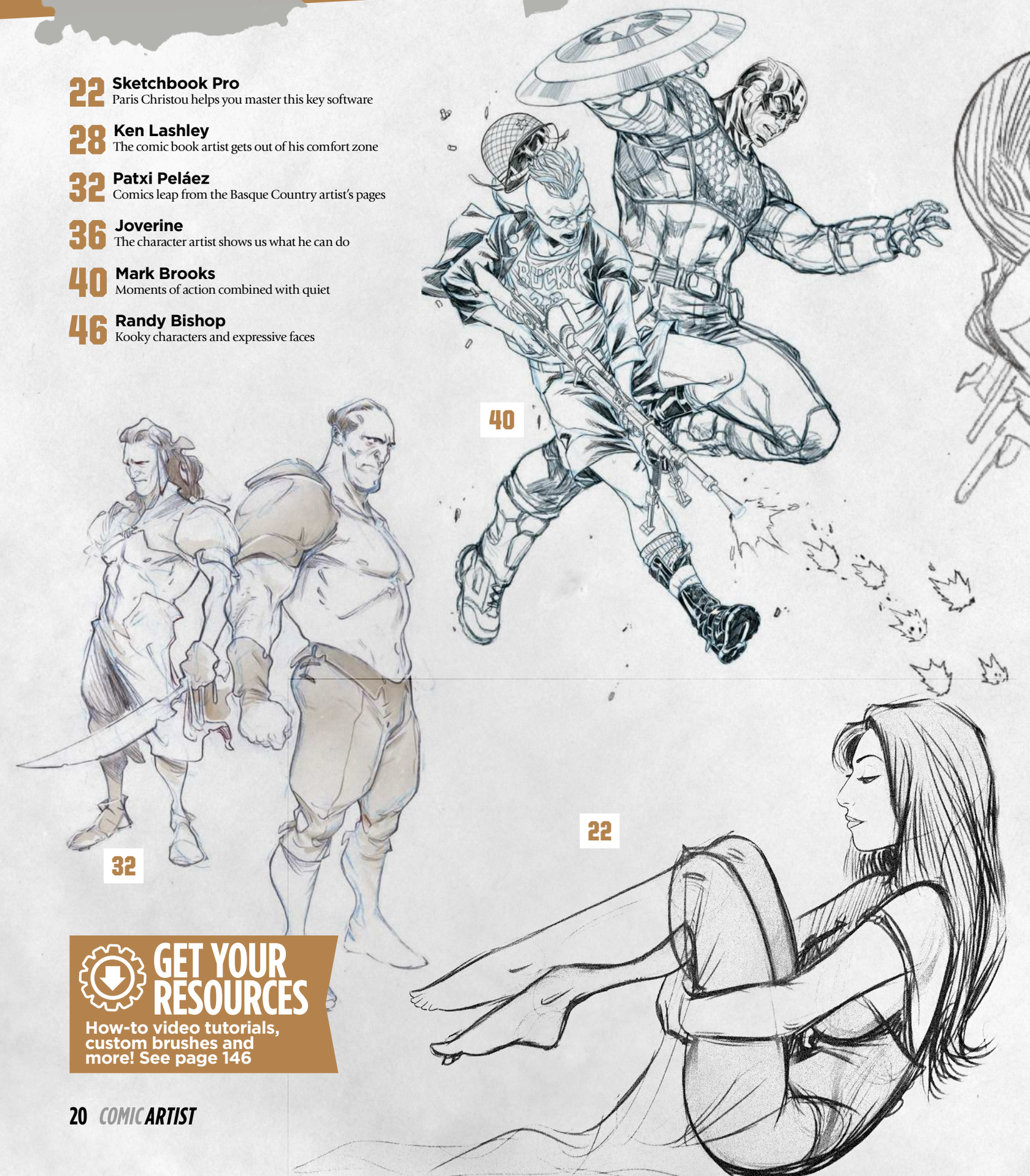
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NEED HELP?

Your questions are answered in every regular issue of ImagineFX. Email **help@imaginefx.com**

SKETCHBOOK PRO

STREAMLINE YOUR SKETCH PROCESS

Get to grips with SketchBook Pro's Lagoon user interface and enhance your workflow in this excellent drawing programme, says our seasoned expert, **PARIS CHRISTOU**

Autodesk's SketchBook Pro for Windows and Mac is known for giving artists easy access to its many tools when working on any type of artwork.

The essential philosophy behind the software is to help artists feel they have an application that acts just like a real-world paper sketchbook, which you'd use while out and about. The programme is quick, simple and very effective.

SketchBook's Pro's Lagoon is a user interface (UI) that offers a series of common shortcuts for speedy access. By default, it's located on the bottom left of the application screen. Having these common shortcuts in one compact area helps you to streamline your painting process. Better still, you can even modify the Lagoon to fit your exact needs. So, let's see how this can be achieved and how to get the best from the software...

1 The Lagoon's tools

The Lagoon UI is an arc-shaped palette that features six core elements. From left to right they are: Interface Controls, Tools/Views, Brushes, Colors, Edit and Files. Each element on the Lagoon has a series of shortcut options that you can access. For example, you can select your favourite brushes, the Lasso and other editable tools, rulers, layers, save your work and more.



2 Selecting tools and actions

Click and hold over any of these tools and you'll be presented with more options. To select any of these, just drag your mouse or stylus pen towards one of them and release when the one you want is highlighted. Once you've memorised the Lagoon's features, accessing any desired option will be instinctive, which will enhance your painting workflow.





3 Get the sketchbook feel

Depending on what type of artist you are, you can choose to hide everything on the screen apart from the Lagoon. This gives you a decent space for either sketching, painting or creating any style of artwork. Just hover over the Interface Controls element and select Title Bar Off. Then press Tab on your keyboard to hide everything.

Artist PROFILE

Paris Christou

COUNTRY: Cyprus



Paris is a 2D animator, illustrator and teacher at ToonBox Studio. He's also a full-time YouTuber who's best known for his popular cartoon pin-up character Cherry. Paris is also the Founder of ToonBoxStudio.com. **www.toonboxstudio.com**

CUSTOMISE THE LAGOON INTERFACE



A. The Preference window

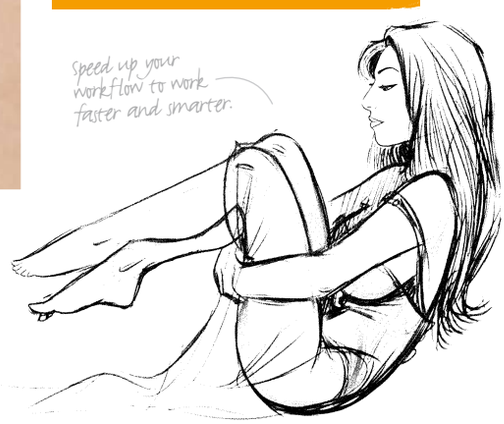
To customise Lagoon, go to SketchBook Pro > Preferences or Edit > Preferences on the main toolbar. In the pop-up window, select the Lagoon tab. The top half features all six options of the Lagoon.

B. Select tools and actions

Select any of the icons and you'll see the sub-options in the bottom half. To the right of them you'll see a section called Default Sketchbook Tools, which lists all the tools and actions available in SketchBook Pro.

C. Replace a tool or action

Select a sub-option, then scroll through the list to replace it with the tool or action you prefer. Artists never use every tool an app offers. I replace any tools or actions I don't need, to speed up my workflow.



SKETCHBOOK PRO

GET TO KNOW THE BRUSH PALETTE

Next, we explain how organising your brushes and tools in SketchBook Pro and managing their properties will improve your creative workflow

> **All the brushes are displayed in one easy-to-access toolbar**

SketchBook Pro comes with a variety of brushes and tools to fit the needs of every artist or designer of all levels of proficiency. All the brushes are displayed in one easy-to-access toolbar called the Brush palette.

This palette offers all the basic tools with simple adjustable properties for you to enjoy working with. The icons within the Brush Palette are graphically visual and easy to identify, which all helps to contribute to a smooth and user-friendly creative workflow.

In this part of our guide you'll learn how to locate the Brush palette within SketchBook Pro, how to open the Brush Properties panel for each brush and how to organise your brushes to improve your painting experience.



1 Finding the brushes

The Brush palette is a window that's located on the left-hand side of the SketchBook Pro screen by default. If you can't see it, just click the Windows tab on the main top toolbar to switch it on. The palette consists of two rows of many tools such as pencils, brushes, synthetic brushes, erasers and smear/smudge brushes. At the top of the Brush palette are two key icons, explained in the next two steps.

2 Explore Brush Properties

The icon on the left opens the Brush Properties window. Once you select a specific brush or tool from the palette and then click the Brush Properties button, a pop-up window will appear. This window enables you to adjust the properties of the selected brush/tool to your liking. Each brush will be slightly different, but it's straightforward enough to adjust its properties.

3 Accessing more brush tools

The icon on the right opens the Brush Library. You'll see another pop-up window presenting every single brush and tool that the software has to offer. There are 100 preset brushes and tools that have been specifically designed for different types of artists. Take the time to scroll through all the tools and test out their properties to see which tool fits your workflow and style.



ORGANISING YOUR BRUSH PALETTE



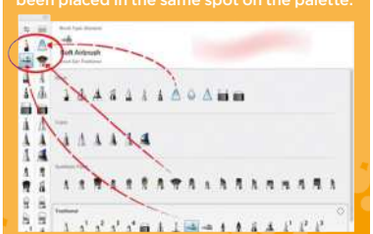
A. Find your favourites

SketchBook Pro enables you to move or replace brushes and tools in the Brush palette for quicker access to the ones you use. Click the top-right icon on the Brush palette to access the Brush Library and locate all the common tools you need.



B. Replacing a brush

Simply click and hold a brush icon from the Brush Library, and drag it over to the Brush palette above the tool that you don't need, then release. You'll see that the selected brush has replaced the unwanted brush and been placed in the same spot on the palette.



C. Moving a brush

To move a brush within the palette, open the Brush Library and locate the brush that you want to move. The process is the same as in step B: just click and hold on the relevant brush, drag it over to the desired spot on the palette, and then release to place it there.

SKETCHBOOK PRO

CUSTOMISE AND SET UP BRUSHES

More is never enough when it comes to art! In addition to selecting the tools you want, you can customise any brush in SketchBook Pro or create your own. Here's how...

The latest SketchBook Pro is an all-in one package crammed full of tools and brushes to satisfy any type of artist, giving you plenty of helpful digital assets to complete your projects.

Although the software provides you with all the tools you need, SketchBook Pro also gives you the power to edit and customise an existing brush, or create your own unique brush, and the possibilities here are almost endless.

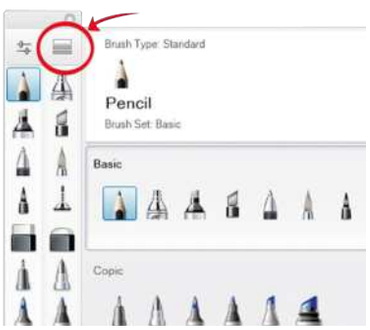
In this short step-by-step guide, you'll learn the basics of creating a new brush, where to customise the brush's properties, how to best name your new brush and change the brush icon, and finally how to add it to the Brush Palette.

I promise it's not as complicated as all that might sound!

> "You can edit and customise brushes – the possibilities are almost endless"

1 Selecting a specific brush

Press 3 and right-click to open the Brush palette. Then select a brush – either one that you want to modify or one that is similar to what you want to create. For this example, I'll select the default Pencil tool, with the intention of creating a new custom pencil. Once you've selected your tool, click the Show Brush Library button located at the top right-hand corner of the Brush palette.



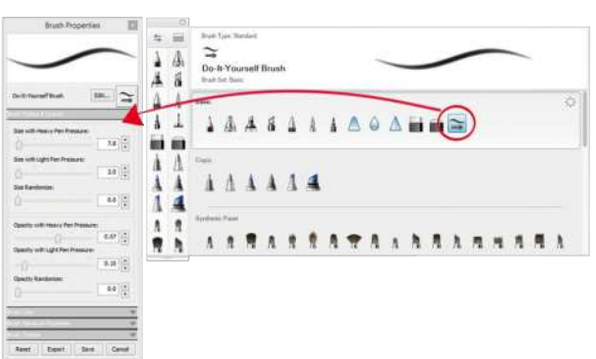
2 Creating a new brush

Next, locate the row of tools in the Brush Library that features the brush you've chosen, hold down your mouse button over the circle of dots that appears around it, and then select the New Brush option to create a new brush. A Create Do-it-yourself Brush window will appear, and this gives you the option to select the type of brush that you want to create. Make sure you choose the Current Brush option.

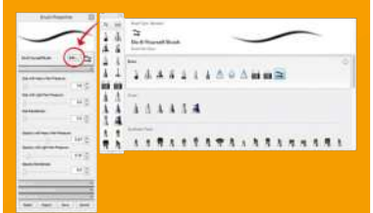


3 Customising the brush properties

Your newly created brush will be found at the end of the row in the Brush Library that you accessed in step 2. Double-click the new brush icon to open the Brush Properties dialogue, which will give you many options to play with. This dialogue enables you to edit the Size, Pressure, Opacity, Color, Spacing, Texture and more. When done, hit the Save button and you can start using your new brush.

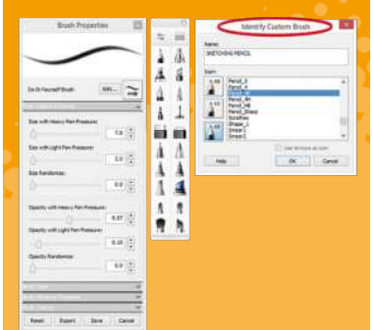


NAME AND CHANGE THE BRUSH ICON



A. Identify Custom Brush

Open the Brush Properties dialogue for your new brush. Click the Edit button, which opens the Identify Custom Brush window. This enables you to give the brush a title and assign an icon to it, to keep your tools organised and help you find what you want.



B. Selecting an icon

You now should be looking at the Identify Custom Brush window. The first option is to name your brush. Below is SketchBook Pro's massive Icons library: scroll through the series and find one that fits best with your new brush. Once you've chosen, hit the Save button to complete the customisation.



C. Adding to the Palette

You will have a new brush sitting in the Brush library. To add it to the Brush palette, click and hold on it, drag it to the palette and release on top of any brush. It will replace the existing brush in the palette, so drag your new tool over one you don't need.

SKETCHBOOK PRO

TAP INTO THE POWER OF LAYERS

Think layers are a luxury? Find out how layers can help you take your work in SketchBook Pro from initial sketch to finished artwork

Layers are an integral part of SketchBook Pro's flexibility. If you've used other software such as Photoshop you'll be familiar with the concept, but if not, imagine a layer as a sheet of glass which can be stacked on top of others. Layers are the building blocks of a piece of artwork.

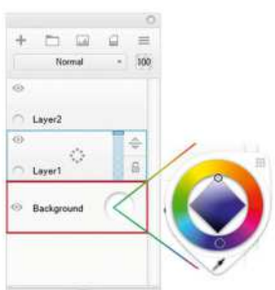
The key is that each layer is normally transparent except where it contains an image element. For example, if I draw or paint a clear blue sky on one piece of glass (a layer), add another piece of glass (a new layer) on top, and then paint a forest scene on the top layer, I'll still be able to see the blue sky on the layer below, peeking through the unpainted parts of my forest layer. That's the power of layers.

Okay, let's see how SketchBook Pro helps you manage your layers.

> "Layers are the building blocks of a piece of artwork"

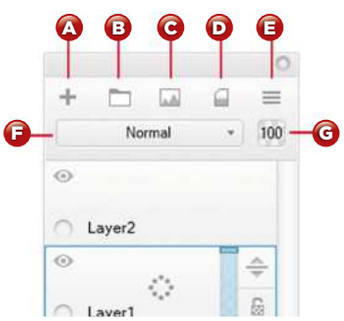
1 Background layer

The background layer enables you to change the colour – and therefore the fundamental mood – of your canvas. To do this in SketchBook Pro, you simply click the white circle on the background layer to open the colour wheel, and then select a colour of your choice. Turning off the eye icon on the background layer will give you a transparent background, which may be useful in some circumstances.



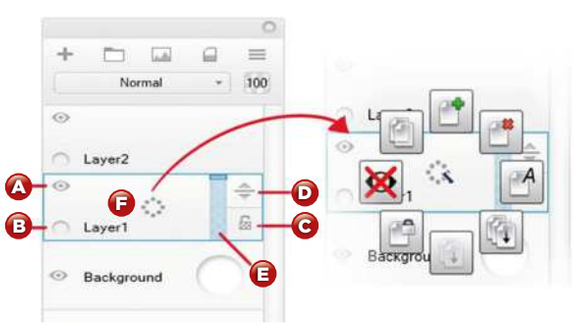
2 The Layers panel

All the features on the Layers panel are shortcuts designed to help you manage your SketchBook Pro layers. They are as follows: Add a new layer (A); Add a new group (B); Add an image (C); Clear anything on the selected layer (D); Open a menu of all the options of the Layer Editor (E); Open a menu of all the Blend Modes (F); and finally adjust the Opacity of the selected layer (G). Once you get used to them they're really useful.



3 Your layer options

Here are all the features on a layer that you can manipulate in SketchBook Pro: Hide/View a layer (A); Colour label the layer (B); Lock the Transparency (C); Change the Opacity of the layer (D); Drag a layer to change the stacking order (E); Click and hold down to access the layer options (F), then click any of these icons: Add Layer, Delete Layer, Rename Layer, Merge All, Merge with Below, Lock Layer, Hide, Duplicate Layer.



GETTING STARTED WITH LAYERS



A. Blueprint sketch

I prefer to start by sketching loosely on layer 1, scribbling out a blueprint to design my artwork. In this phase I can experiment, enjoy making mistakes and trying to solve them. At this stage I don't stress over details or getting any of the lines perfect, but instead focus on the forms, shapes, gestures and overall composition.



B. Creating the line art

I reduce the Opacity of the sketch layer to about 50 per cent and create a new layer above this layer. This is the clean-up stage where I'll carefully draw the clean lines over the rough sketch with a black pencil using a feathering technique. I'm careful to observe the blueprint below and concentrate on the thickness and value of my line art.



C. Colouring the artwork

Now that I have the clean line art, I turn off the rough sketch layer and create a new layer between the line art layer and the rough sketch layer. The new layer will be my colour layer, and I use the Round brush and the Airbrush to colour my artwork. Once I've finished my artwork, I merge all the layers together and save the image.

SKETCHBOOK PRO

USING LOCK TRANSPARENCY

Take advantage of the power of SketchBook Pro's Lock Transparency function and make life easier when you're rendering or colouring your artwork

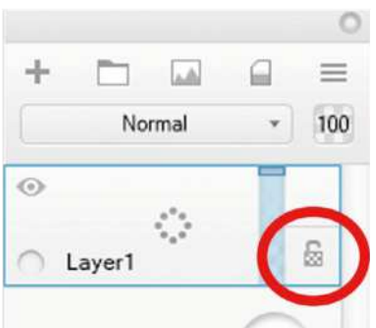
Along with all the amazing user-friendly tools and options you'll find in the current version of SketchBook Pro for Windows and Mac, the powerful Lock Transparency function can make your life much easier and help improve your workflow when creating artwork.

In this guide you'll learn where to find this function, how to colour your line-art and even render any element you either draw or paint on the canvas using Lock Transparency. The name isn't very helpful: it doesn't so much lock anything as mask transparent areas of a layer. All you really need to remember is that when it's active, you can affect only content that already exists on the layer, not draw or paint in new areas. This is a basic formula to help you better understand this function.

> "When it's active, you can affect only content that already exists on the layer"

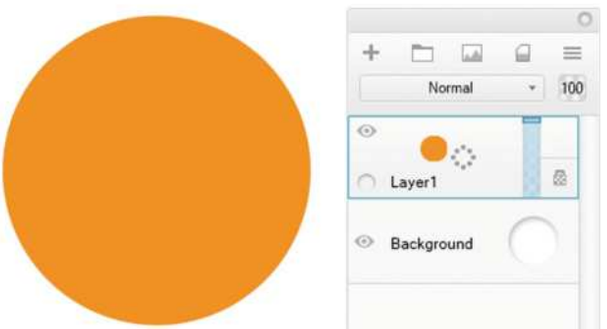
1 Locate the Lock Transparency option

The Lock Transparency function is located at the bottom-right of each layer – the padlock icon. This function enables you to edit anything you draw or paint on a layer, which can speed up your workflow significantly. Bear in mind that when you draw or paint, it's always best to separate your primary elements on to different layers before applying the Lock Transparency function.



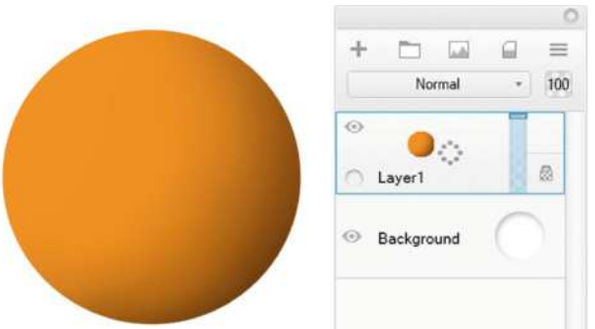
2 Paint an element and lock its transparency

Select a paint brush and paint an orange circle on a layer. If you then enable Lock Transparency on this layer, you can paint only inside the orange circle. This means you'll keep your edges nice and sharp. However, you won't be able to erase the orange circle as long as Lock Transparency is enabled, because this function enables you only to add to the layer and not subtract from it.



3 Render the painted element

Switch to the Airbrush tool or a soft Round brush and choose a dark brown colour. Begin painting around the side of the orange circle and you'll soon see the effect of Lock Transparency. Notice how accurate the edges are: your paint stays within the painted circle. This technique keeps your painting clean, enabling you to focus on blending and colouring your artwork.

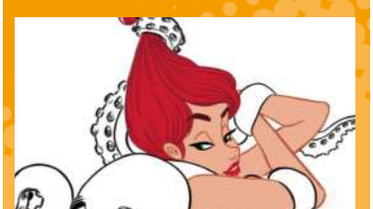


TAKE CONTROL OF YOUR COLOURING



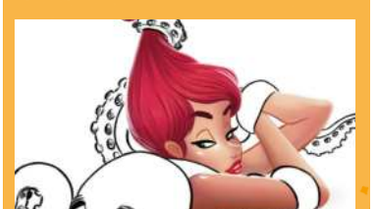
A. Get your layers organised first!

My layers are always organised by having a layer for each major element in my artwork. In this example I have a layer for my line-art at the top and a layer for the subsequent base colours of my character's skin and hair. This means I have full control over editing each element separately.



B. Colouring the line-art

The next step is to enable the Lock Transparency function for my line-art layer, which gives me the option to colour just the outline of my character. Select the base colour of the skin and go slightly darker. Notice now as I paint the skin outlines, it gels the lines with the skin colour. I then repeat the process for the line-art of the eyes, lips and hair.



C. Add light and shadows to the base colours

For the final stage, I Lock Transparency for the base colour layers, take an airbrush and start rendering by shading in the tones. My main focus is to play with the edges of the base colours to reflect light and shadow. You can always go back into the line-art layer and adjust the colours to fit the tones.

SKETCHBOOK PRO

BRING YOUR ART TO ANIMATED LIFE

Learn the basics of the fledgling Flipbook feature in SketchBook Pro 7, and with a bit of planning you can use it to produce an effective animation

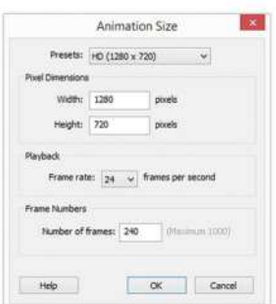
The animation Flipbook feature in SketchBook Pro 7 can for now be considered a bit of an experiment from the programme's developers. It's best to see the tool as a work-in-progress project, because while the brush tools and user-friendly functions are impressive, this new feature is still limited. But it's worth spending a little time investigating.

You can't export your animation as a video file and the layers system is very basic, but to be fair, this is the beginning of a feature that could very well lead to the next generation of "tradigital" animation tools. In this brief introduction I'll guide you through the animation side of SketchBook Pro, reveal how to animate with the Flipbook, and explain how to handle the new layers system.

> "This is a feature that could lead to the next generation of animation tools"

1 Set up your project

Select File from the main toolbar and choose New Flipbook. The project panel will appear, containing a range of properties to choose from. The presets are the pixel dimensions of your project, and you can also input the dimensions to create your own custom size. The next option is the frame rate or how many frames per second your animation will be. The final option is to decide how many frames your scene will consist of.



2 The animation timeline

The timeline is a series of frames from 0 up to the number of frames that a scene consists of. The animation is played back frame by frame along the timeline at the frame rate you selected in the previous step. On the left of the timeline are the keyframe options, where you can add and delete a key. On the right are the playback controls.



3 The Flipbook layers system

The layers system is very different from what you'll find in any other software. You can't add or delete a layer, but you do have three specific layers to use for your Flipbook animation. The background layer is a static layer across the timeline for you to draw and paint the environment of your scene. The fore- and mid-ground layers are related to each frame on the timeline. END

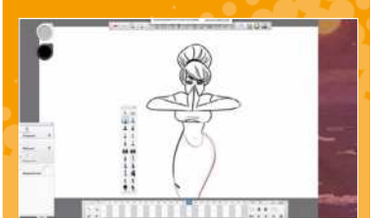


PREPARE YOUR ART FOR ANIMATION



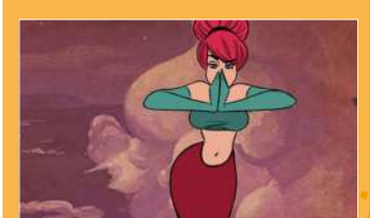
A. Planning your scene

Plan out your sequence beforehand on paper. This will help you to figure out the timing and spacing of your scene. I like to sketch out thumbnails and keep this stage very rough and loose, which means I can focus on the poses and the silhouettes. You'll also be able to work out how many frames a sequence will consist of.



B. Sketching

Because the layer system is very limited, select the mid-ground and start sketching out the rough animation along the timeline. Always refer back to your thumbnails and try to stay as loose as possible. Once you've completed the rough animation, take the Soft Eraser and gently erase 50 per cent of each frame to reduce its opacity.



C. Cleaning up and colour

Tidy up the rough animation by selecting the foreground and going over every keyframe along the timeline. This stage can take time and effort to keep the lines consistent: if you rush it, the forms will either expand or shrink. Once you've cleaned the frames, erase every keyframe on the mid-ground and add your chosen colours.

Sketchbook

Ken Lashley

The comic book artist opens up his sketchbook and reveals how it helps him get out of his comfort zone

Artist PROFILE

Ken Lashley
COUNTRY: US



Ken, otherwise known as Ledkilla, has worked in the world of comic books and illustration for well over 20 years, drawing celebrated characters such as Batman, Superman and the X-Men. But he's also collaborated with high-profile companies such as Hasbro, Lucasfilm and Mattel, creating artwork for their toy ranges and events.
www.ledkilla.tumblr.com

MIX 'N' MATCH

"I like this one because these things aren't supposed to go together, which makes for a fun sketch. I find that the better you can handle the finishing style, the more believable it will come across."

EVIL QUEEN

"I was looking at some Star Wars concept work that day and this was born. I do work for lots of different companies and although it seems like a ton of different styles it's really all the same. A drawing is a drawing – it's the focus of a certain piece that brings it to life".



I SEE YOU

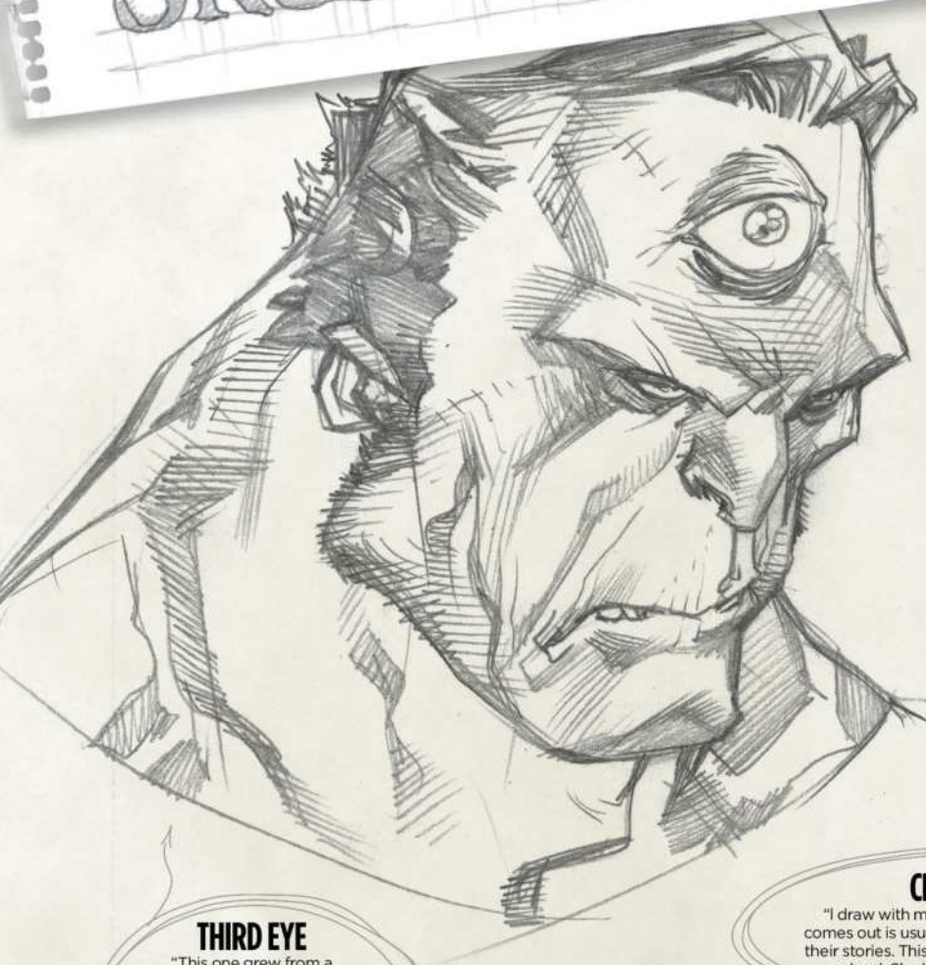
"I was working on pushing the perspective a bit this day. I didn't go as far as I could have, but it's a start. I think each of us does things within our comfort zone – I try to get out of that when I doodle or sketch."

TROUBLEMAKER

"I've been doing comics in the traditional sense for years, so when I sketch I go over the top. When I work on Superman or Batman you don't get to create crazy stuff like this very often, so when the mood strikes me, I let loose with the pencil."

"Each of us does things within our comfort zone – I try to get out of that when I doodle or sketch"

Sketchbook





THIRD EYE

"This one grew from a conversation with my daughter. We often draw together; she gives me ideas and I have five minutes to draw something. These challenges really push me. I don't draw the things I'm good at – I'm drawing whatever comes to her mind."

CRANKY KID

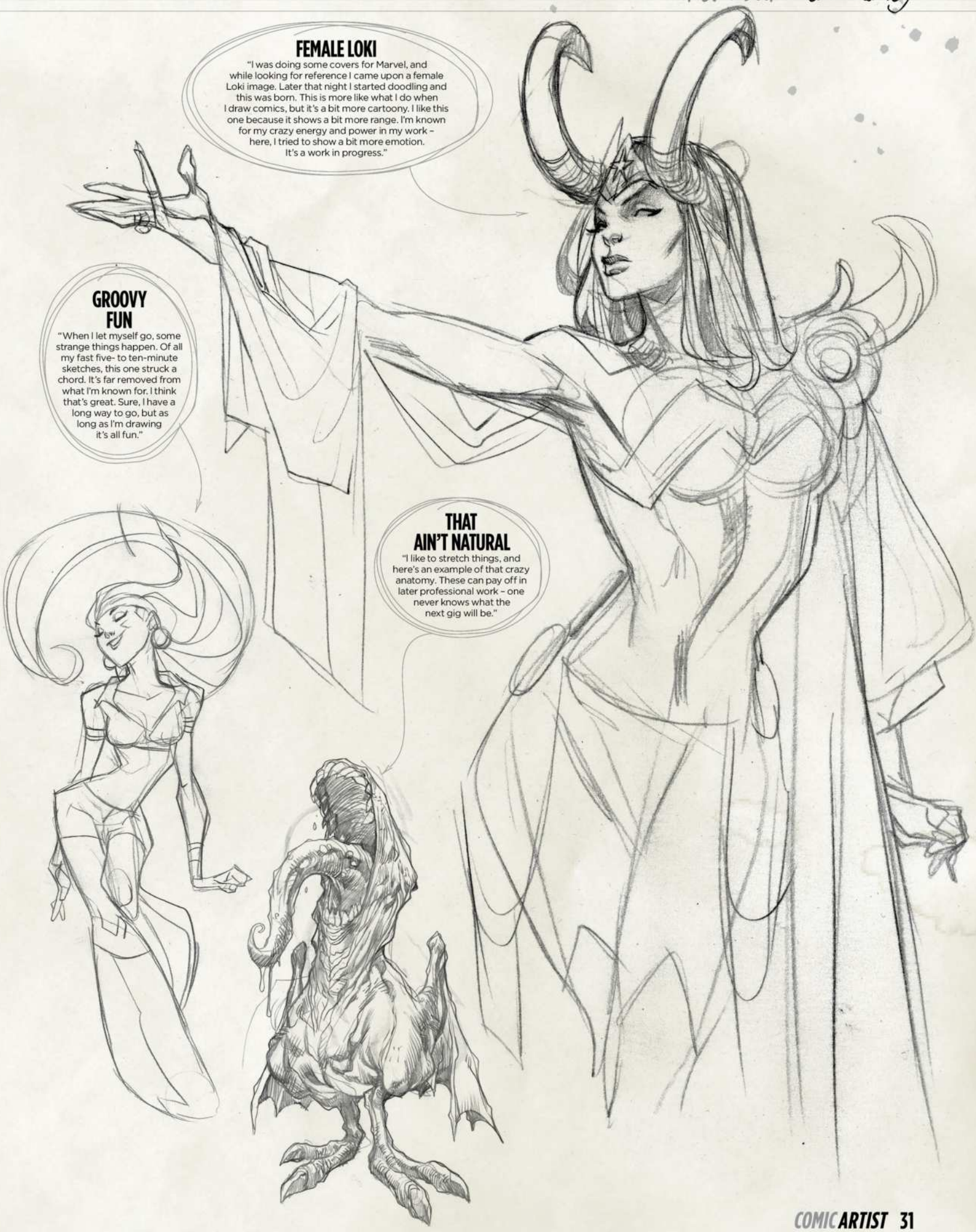
"I draw with my kids all the time and what comes out is usually a mood taken from one of their stories. This one was from a cranky day at school. She loved this one. I like it, too."

FILLING THE ROOM

"I draw these sheets all the time. It's the 'first thing in my head' kind of drawing. Some fun things come out during one of these – I give myself 40 minutes and the idea is to fill every corner."



"When I let myself go, some strange things happen"



FEMALE LOKI

"I was doing some covers for Marvel, and while looking for reference I came upon a female Loki image. Later that night I started doodling and this was born. This is more like what I do when I draw comics, but it's a bit more cartoony. I like this one because it shows a bit more range. I'm known for my crazy energy and power in my work – here, I tried to show a bit more emotion. It's a work in progress."

GROOVY FUN

"When I let myself go, some strange things happen. Of all my fast five- to ten-minute sketches, this one struck a chord. It's far removed from what I'm known for. I think that's great. Sure, I have a long way to go, but as long as I'm drawing it's all fun."

THAT AIN'T NATURAL

"I like to stretch things, and here's an example of that crazy anatomy. These can pay off in later professional work – one never knows what the next gig will be."

Sketchbook

Patxi Peláez

Comic characters are trying to leap from the pages of this Basque Country artist's sketchbook

PROFILE

Patxi Peláez
LOCATION: Spain



Patxi lives in the Basque Country, Spain, where he's worked in the animation industry for over 20 years, as an art director, character designer and in visual development for feature films and television. He's also an illustrator of children's books for various publishers in Spain.
www.facebook.com/patxi.pelaez.7



"Before I discovered animation, my first love was comics, so I draw lots of comic characters"


ATROPOS
"This is Atropos, a little bastard with bad intentions. He appears in Insomnia by Stephen King. I really like his books, which are filled with memorable characters."
ALIEN
"I like playing with the anatomy of the characters. The creatures and monsters let me do these things. It's good fun."
BIG GUYS
"A drawing without direction or pretension. It's what happens when you doodle while you're talking on the phone."
GORGON
"I love Marvel comics. Here's my version of Gorgon, an Inhuman. Marvel has an incredible gallery of characters to inspire."

Sketchbook



ROBIN HOOD
"Research characters based on the story of Robin Hood. The most fun thing about my job is when you are drawing what you love, without pressure. This sketch is one of those."

THE BATMAN
"Despite my love of comics, I've barely forayed into the industry. Some of my favourite artists come from this medium and I hope to have time in the future to work in comics, whether as penciller or inker. For now it's just a dream, though. Here's Batman and an Accidental Geisha."

AZAZEL
"A quick sketch of another demon, done digitally. It's great, but I still prefer the traditional pen on paper."

"The most fun thing is when you're drawing what you love, without any pressure"



JOHN CARTER
"Another personal version, this time of Edgar Rice Burroughs' character John Carter from Mars."



EARRINGS
"A small pencil sketch of some girls' heads. This was just for fun and to look deeper into my own style."

VENOM
"I enjoy giving my own personal vision of familiar characters and this is Venom, a well-known character from Marvel Comics."



HEROES
"Batgirl, a Ninja Turtle and another big guy. When I draw I like the mixture of realistic and cartoon style. It's the drawing style that appeals to me the most."

OLD CHINESE DRAGON
"Designs for an animated film in Spain. In my work, many versions are usually drawn before finding the final one."



Sketchbook

Joverine

From familiar comic book characters to original concepts and childhood creations, this artist's sketchbook is full of life!

PROFILE

Joverine
COUNTRY: Canada



Joverine has worked in the comics, video games and toy industries. Rather than treating a sketchbook as a way to "capture scribbles", the artist says he loves to lose himself in an idea, harnessing the raw energy of inspiration and riding it all the way through the page.
www.instagram.com/joverine

WEIGHT OF THE WORLD

"Random sketch of two of my favourite characters... in their later years."

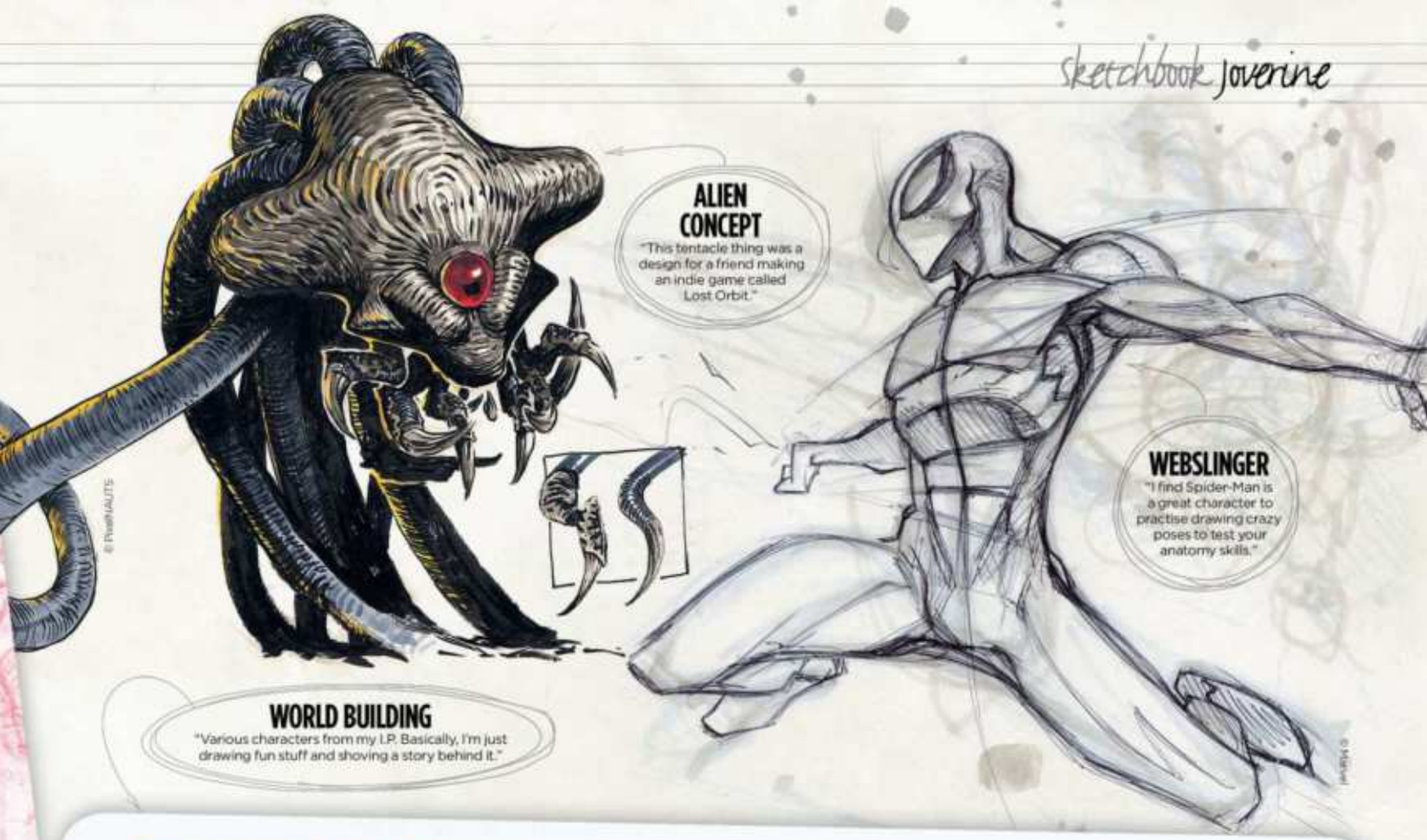




BATTLE BERZERKER BALTO

"This is my own creation, Balto. I first drew him when I was about 13. He's changed slightly each year, but only recently have I been exploring different colour schemes."

"I'm just drawing fun stuff and then shoving a story behind it"



ALIEN CONCEPT

"This tentacle thing was a design for a friend making an indie game called Lost Orbit."

WEBSLINGER

"I find Spider-Man is a great character to practise drawing crazy poses to test your anatomy skills."

WORLD BUILDING

"Various characters from my I.P. Basically, I'm just drawing fun stuff and shoving a story behind it."



Sketchbook



DEVILMANVERINE

"I tried to draw Devilman from memory. Turns out I was a bit off. It reminded me of Wolverine, so I sketched him, too."

Wolverine © Marvel



GATEKEEPER MINI COMIC

"I've been working on my own stories for a while now. This was done on the fly, panel by panel, as a fun exercise."



VIKING

"Head sketch of a random Viking dude while testing out some new pens."



TONGUE TIED

"Guess this guy wouldn't stop talking! This was a drawing for an online drawing group."



CRASHING THE PARTY

"I drew this to be a print to sell at conventions, but never got around to it."



> "I've always found it boring to do studies of static poses…"

POKE MONSTER HUNTING

"I've always found it boring to do studies of static poses. Drawing scenes of characters interacting is a great workaround."

CARNAGE WATERCOLOURS

"I inked this one on a live stream via YouTube. I scanned the inks and printed it out on card stock so I could colour the copy. This way I could sell them together as a package: Rough drawing, inks and painted. It'll be available on my Instagram art store soon."



© Marvel

Sketchbook

Mark Brooks

Moments of all-out action mix with quiet vignettes and a one-man marching band on the pages of this accomplished comic book artist

Artist PROFILE

Mark Brooks
COUNTRY: US

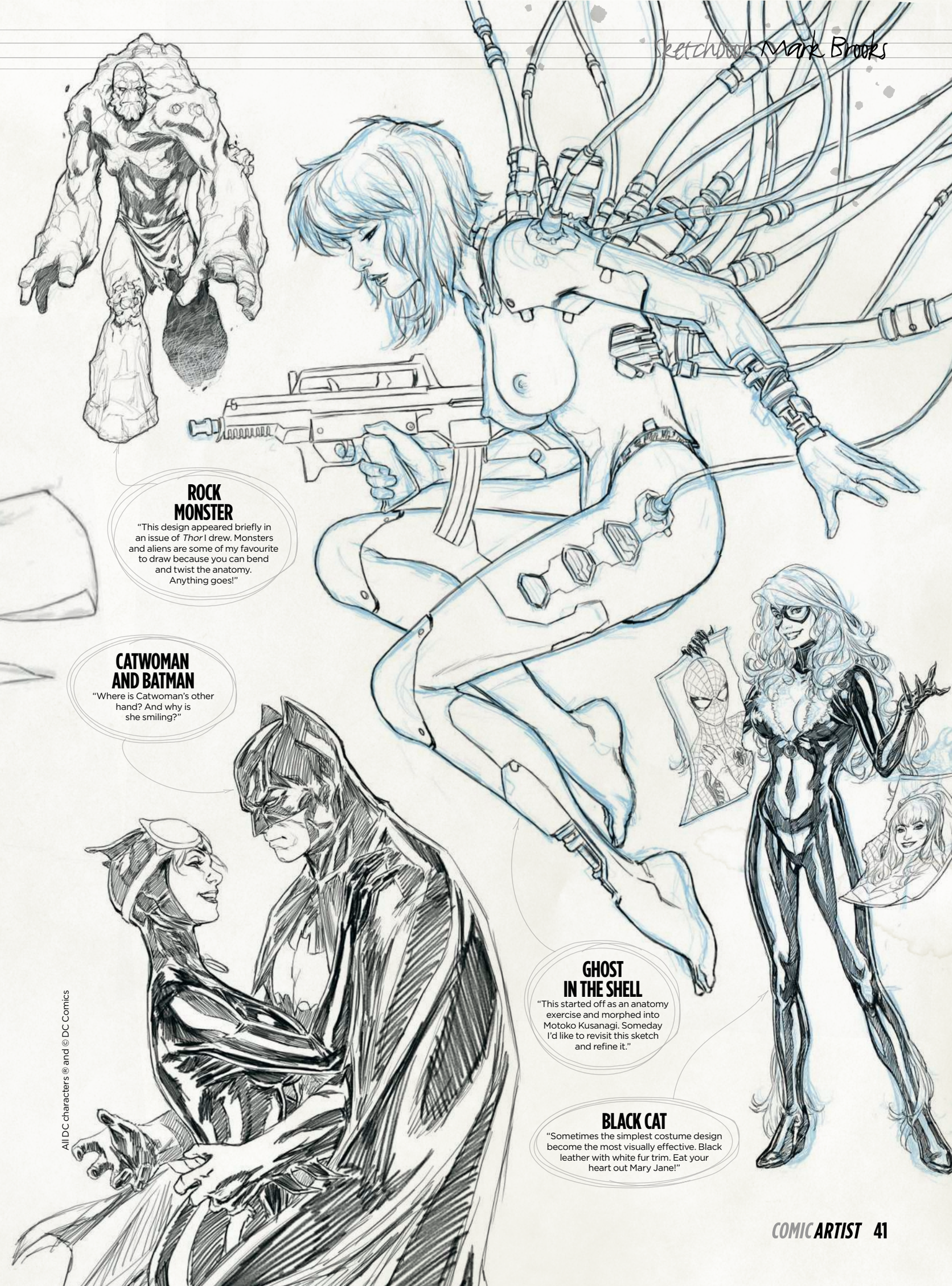
Mark is an Inkpot award-winning artist for Marvel Comics. His career has spanned 15 years and included stints as a cover and interior artist on *Spider-Man*, *X-Men* and the *Avengers*. When not drawing comics Mark spends his time contributing concept and character designs for video games, toys companies and television.
http://ifxm.ag/m-brooks



"Monsters and aliens are some of my favourite to draw because you can bend and twist the anatomy"

THOR
"One of the more complicated costumes in the Marvel universe, but so much fun to draw."

All Marvel characters ® and © Marvel Entertainment, LLC



ROCK MONSTER

"This design appeared briefly in an issue of *Thor* I drew. Monsters and aliens are some of my favourite to draw because you can bend and twist the anatomy. Anything goes!"

CATWOMAN AND BATMAN

"Where is Catwoman's other hand? And why is she smiling?"

GHOST IN THE SHELL

"This started off as an anatomy exercise and morphed into Motoko Kusanagi. Someday I'd like to revisit this sketch and refine it."

BLACK CAT

"Sometimes the simplest costume design become the most visually effective. Black leather with white fur trim. Eat your heart out Mary Jane!"

All DC characters ® and © DC Comics

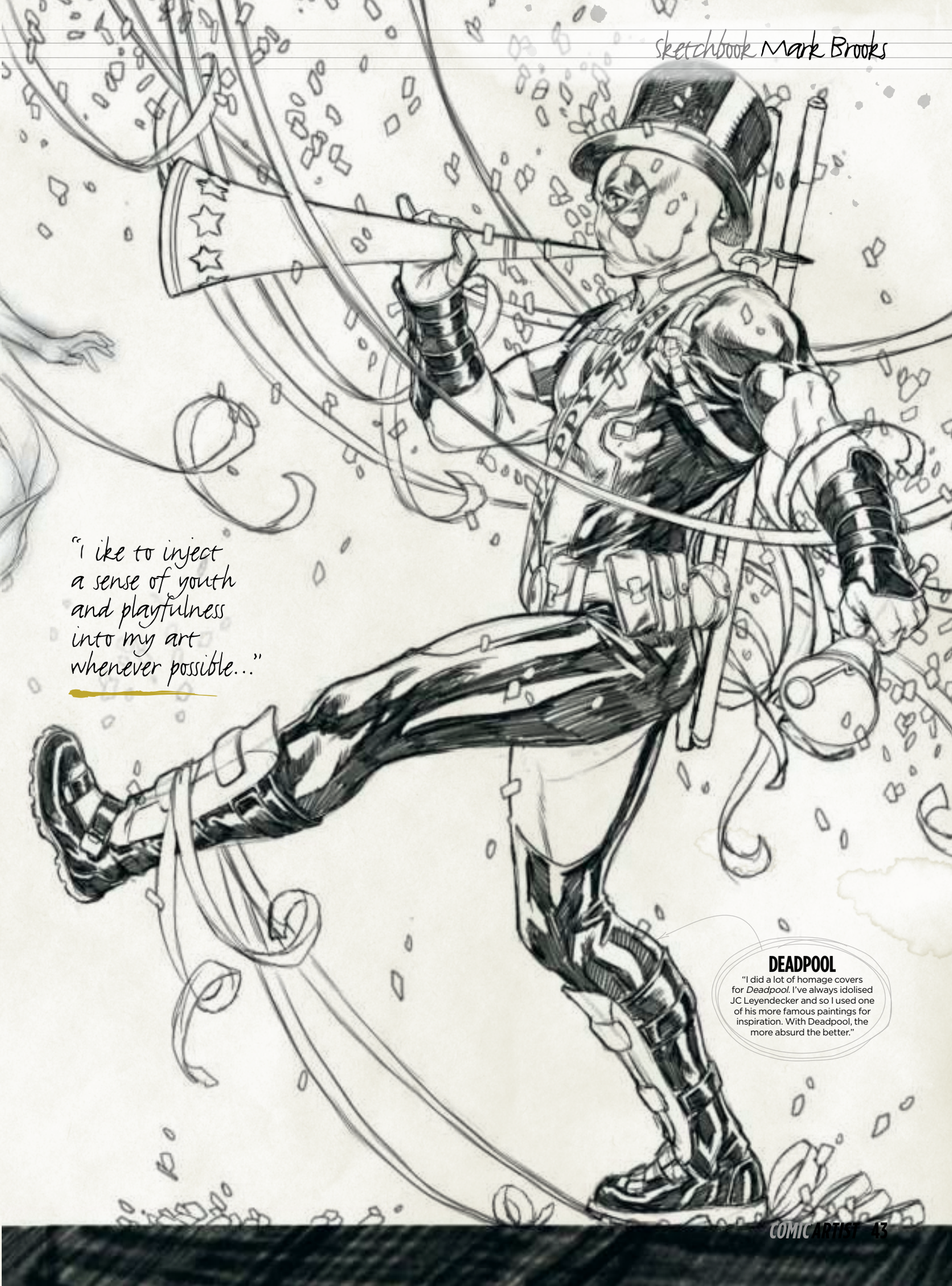
Sketchbook



PHOENIX
"Can you tell I love drawing hair? I like to think of it as twisting ribbons that fall and bend, instead of individual strands."

SPIDER-GWEN
"I like to inject a sense of youth and playfulness into my art whenever possible. After all, you can't draw dark and brooding all the time..."

LOKI
"Turn Loki into a woman? Sure, it's comics so why not!"



"I like to inject a sense of youth and playfulness into my art whenever possible..."

DEADPOOL

"I did a lot of homage covers for *Deadpool*. I've always idolised JC Leyendecker and so I used one of his more famous paintings for inspiration. With Deadpool, the more absurd the better."

Sketchbook

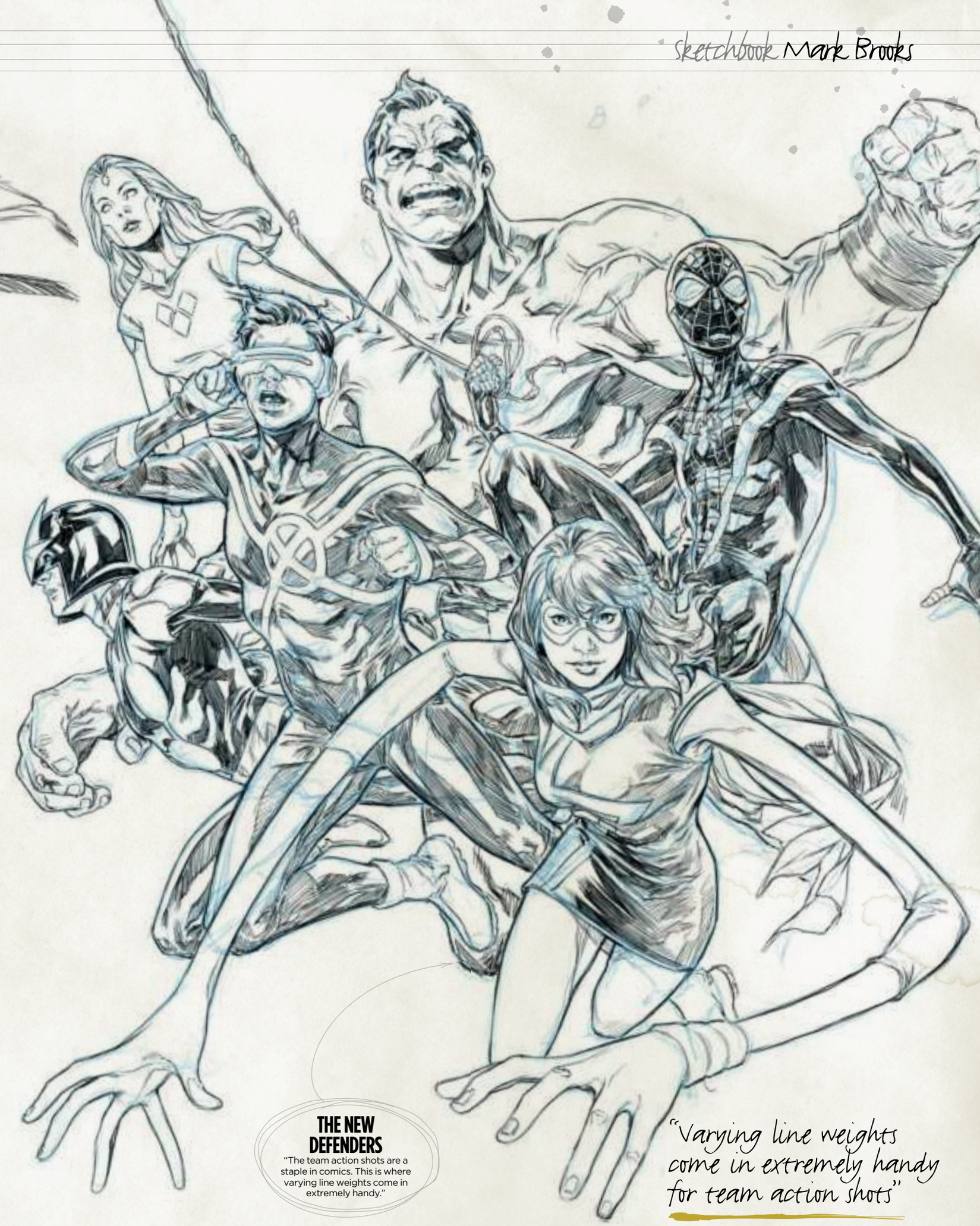


Page 5 and 6

MAGNETO
"I like drawing these quieter moments because it gives me the chance to humanise these fantastical characters. They become grounded and relatable."

TANK GIRL
"Not sure about you, but my ideal woman curses and lot and drives a tank."

QUENTIN QUIRE AND CAPTAIN AMERICA
"I love the idea of Cap's new sidekick being a smart-assed nihilist, even if it was short lived."



THE NEW DEFENDERS

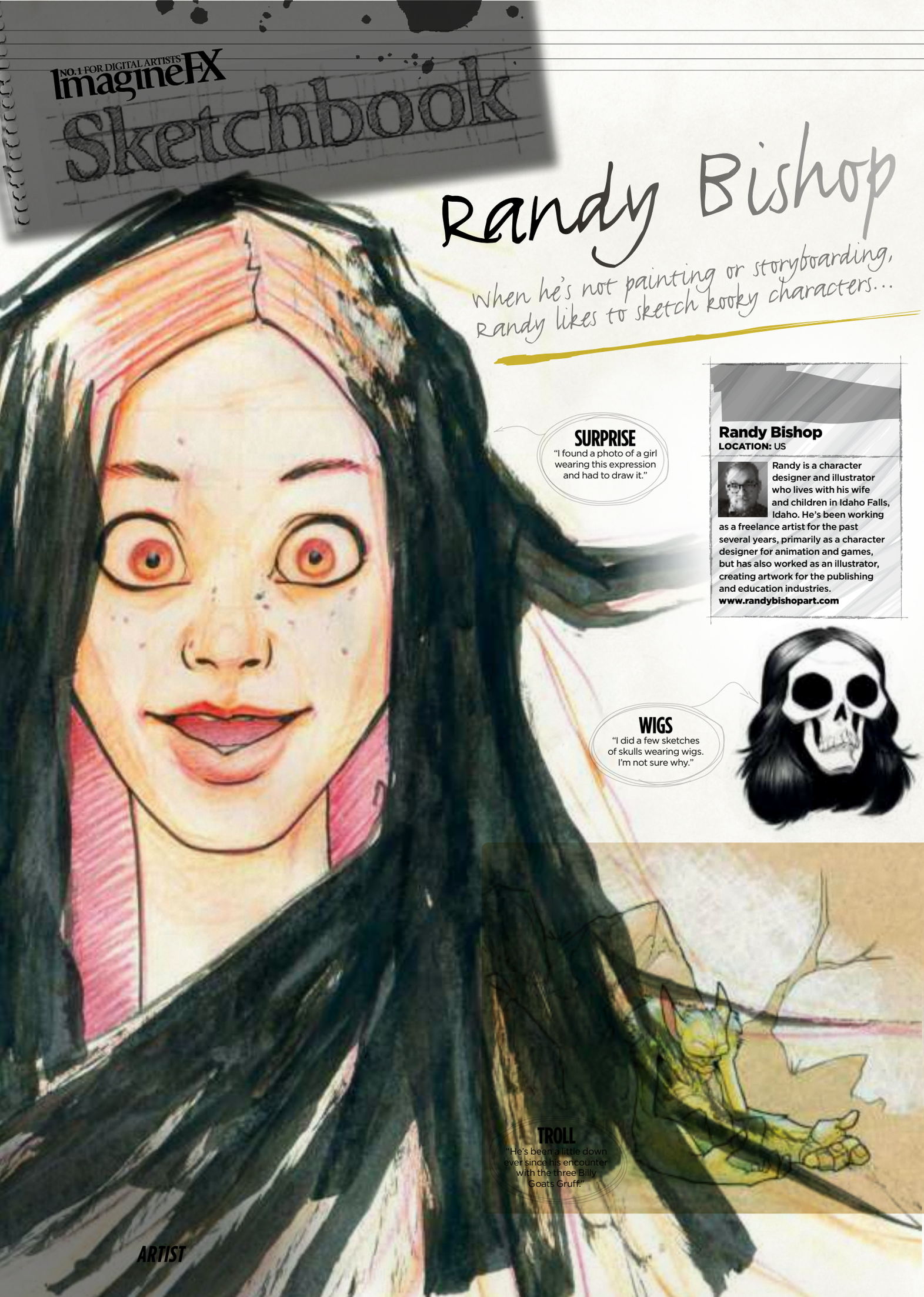
"The team action shots are a staple in comics. This is where varying line weights come in extremely handy."

"Varying line weights come in extremely handy for team action shots"

Randy Bishop

When he's not painting or storyboarding, Randy likes to sketch kooky characters...

SURPRISE
"I found a photo of a girl wearing this expression and had to draw it."



Randy Bishop
LOCATION: US

Randy is a character designer and illustrator who lives with his wife and children in Idaho Falls, Idaho. He's been working as a freelance artist for the past several years, primarily as a character designer for animation and games, but has also worked as an illustrator, creating artwork for the publishing and education industries.
www.randybishopart.com

WIGS
"I did a few sketches of skulls wearing wigs. I'm not sure why."

TROLL
"He's been a little down ever since his encounter with the three Billy Goats Gruff."

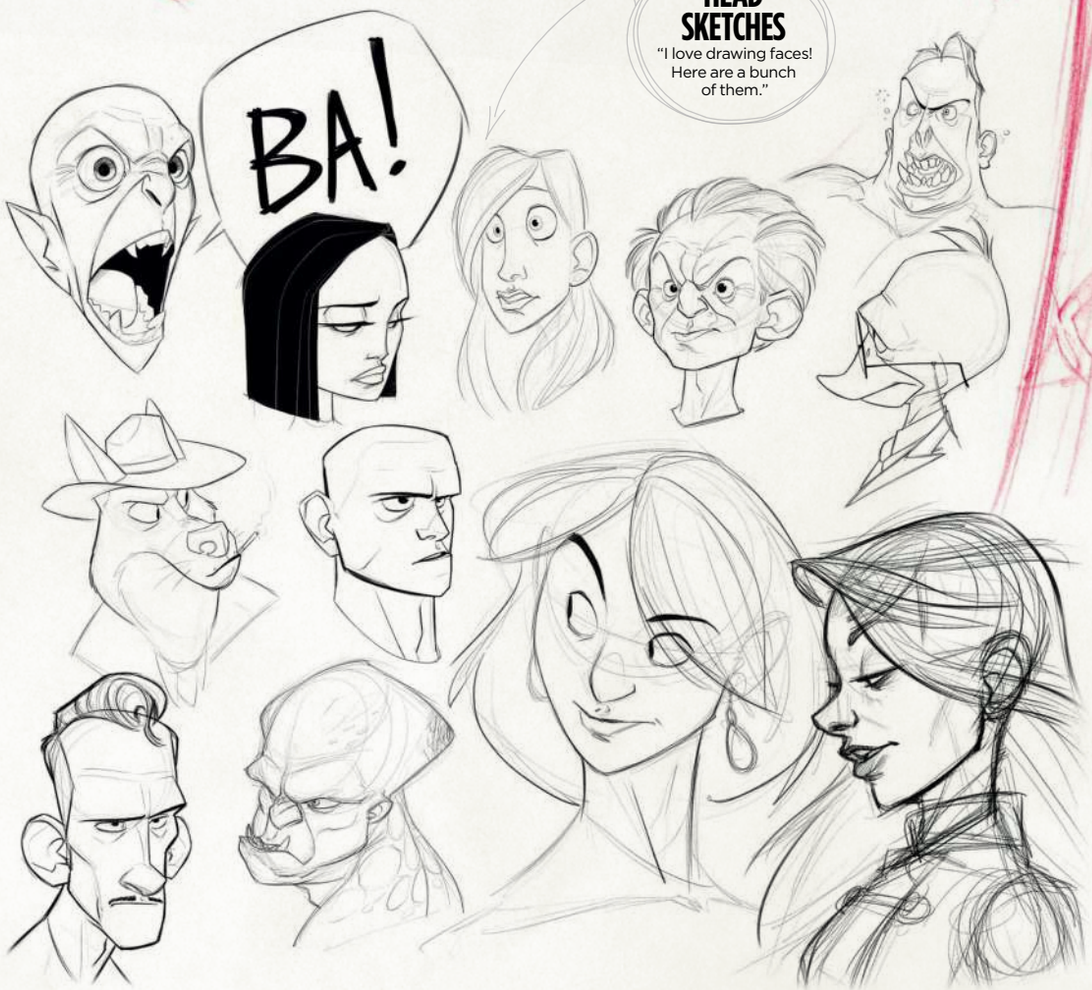


SHE'S A GIRL
"It took me a minute to decide whether I was drawing a man or a woman when I was drawing this. She's a little ambiguous, but I kind of like it."



CONTROL YOUR CANINE
"I wanted to practise drawing two characters interacting. I was seeing a lot of photos of girls holding little dogs and decided to do something similar."

HEAD SKETCHES
"I love drawing faces! Here are a bunch of them."



"I was seeing a lot of photos of girls holding little dogs and decided to do something similar"

Sketchbook



THIS IS SERIOUS

"A couple of random dudes from my sketchbook."



FULL-MOON THIEVERY

"I drew this around Halloween time. It was meant to be an illustration, but I never finished it."

HOW YOU DOIN'?

"I was thinking about how much we could miss out on when we're completely absorbed by our devices. Then I drew this."



YOU'RE CUTE

"I'm a big fan of English fashion. This was an attempt to capture my favourite parts of it."



PRETTY PROFILE

"There's something gorgeous about a strong profile. I absolutely love drawing women with chiselled noses and chins."

BOWLER

"I'm a fan of bowler hats. I'm also a fan of arbitrary skin colours."

"I absolutely love drawing women with chiselled noses and chins"





WHITE ELEPHANT

"This was an invitation to a Christmas party that my wife and I threw last year."

INTERVIEWS

52 **Tony S Daniel**
Artwork from a glittering career drawing top characters

60 **Ken Lashley**
Incredible artwork from a comic-book hero

68 **Fiona Staples**
The award-winning artist on Saga and more



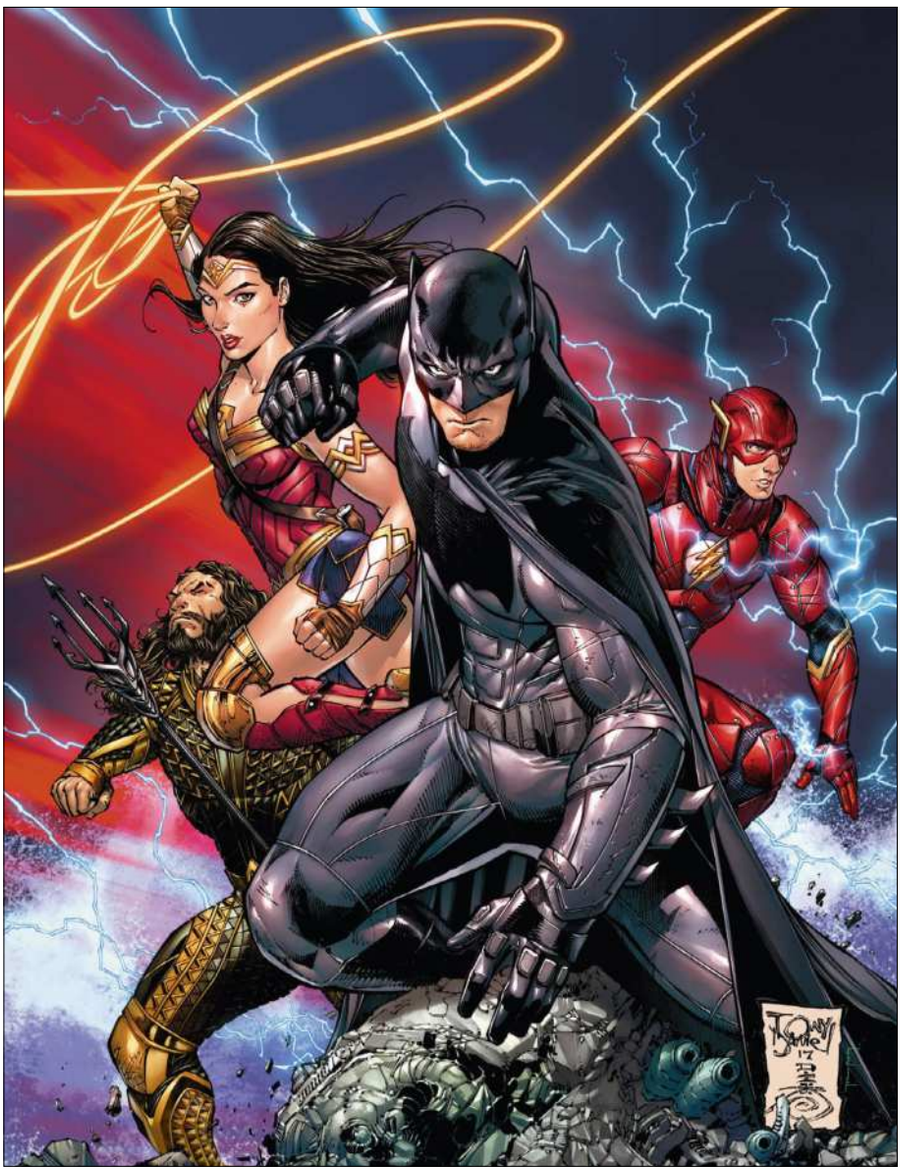


52



68







NEED HELP?

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ARTIST PORTFOLIO

TONY S DANIEL

This artist has had a glittering career drawing and writing some of the best comics out there.

Just like the Joker, Tony S Daniel is wrestling with Batman. As we're interviewing him, issue 45 of the latest series is in its death throes, and it simply won't die.

Normally, Batman wouldn't be such a problem for the artist, who's returning to a character he's pencilled numerous times during his career. The trouble is that his inker has dropped out mid-issue, so he's on double duty, drawing and inking his boards on the fly, Fed Ex-ing them off to DC Comics while responding to our questions.

Long hours aside, Batman is where Tony's fans want him, and it's where he wants to be. "It's like that feeling you get when you go back to your favourite place," he says. "It's still what you remember, but you're older and wiser and maybe you can even appreciate a few details you didn't first time around. It's a good feeling."

Working with writer Tom King, this latest run is kicking off with a new time-travelling storyline featuring Booster Gold, Catwoman and, of course, the Caped Crusader. Tony has always been a fan of a bigger, darker and grittier Batman, a character whose moods are shaped by the murder of his parents in Gotham City. He's an artist who feels he's at his most effective ➤

Artist PROFILE

Tony S Daniel
LOCATION: US
FAVOURITE ARTISTS: John Byrne, Mike Zeck, Barry Windsor-Smith, Moebius, Liberatore, Jim Lee, Marc Silvestri
MEDIA USED: Pencil on Bristol board
WEB: www.twitter.com/TonyDanielx2



© DC Comics 2018



© DC Comics 2018

FROM PENCILS TO INK
A new era of Batman begins with the current series issue 45, as Tony S Daniel returns as the artist. Here's the first cover of the new run.



> **“Working on Batman is like that feeling you get when you go back to your favourite place”**

SUMMER BLOCKBUSTER
This cover variant accompanied the 2017 issue of Justice League that DC published to coincide with the Warner Bros. film based on the series.

© DC Comics 2017

THE TENTH

Creator-owned books are a big part of Tony's career

It was back in the late 1990s that Tony S Daniel made his name in the comic book world with a creator-owned series called The Tenth. Beginning as a four-part mini-series with Image, it later returned for 14 more issues published by Dark Horse.

Fans constantly ask Tony if he'll ever return to it and while it's something he'd love to do, he doesn't want to make any promises.

"I've thought about the Tenth and for me, the concept and approach would need a complete reboot," he says. "I wouldn't approach the book the way I did back when I created it. It would serve me better to create a brand new property."

One option is for him to write it, and have someone else draw it. However, his instinct is to create something new that's creator-owned, or devote his time to a screenplay and push his career more towards Hollywood.

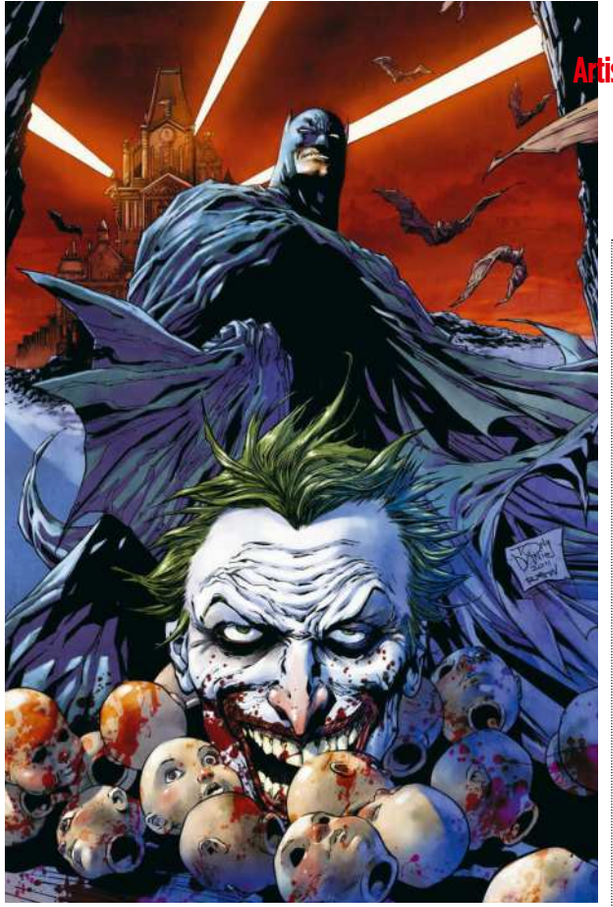
But back in the 90s, The Tenth opened the door for him to work on Teen Titans with another great writer, Geoff Johns. "A lot of people wanted to see me fail. I represented the 'Image era' and people were sick of that. But I came in and threw people a curveball. It was still me, but drawing in more of a mainstream style," he says.

HOLDING BACK MONSTERS
Esperanza del Toro and Zorina Fine team up with the tenth monster to fight Rhazes Darkk's army.





DEBUT ISSUE
Here's the inked version of issue one of The Tenth, with Tony working in that exaggerated Image Comics style.



© DC Comics 2011



© DC Comics 2015

FACES OF DEATH
Tony's unsettling cover for Detective Comics, volume 1 – part of DC's ambitious New 52 relaunch of its titles back in 2011.

DK III
As a past master of Batman, Tony was invited to create a variant cover for issue one of DK III by Frank Miller and Brian Azzarello.

THE HOLE IN THINGS
Brilliant pencil work from Batman 701, the R.I.P. storyline was written by Grant Morrison, with Tony drawing and inking.



© DC Comics 2010

when he's loose and spontaneous, and that could be the vibe when issue 45 lands on the shelves.

There's a sense that Tony wants to get back on track with Batman. His last significant encounter with the character was during the New 52 reboot DC carried out in 2011. Tony relaunched Detective Comics at that time, which features Batman as its lead. The run ended prematurely with Tony feeling a little burned out. "I was overworked at that time, writing Hawkman, and writing and drawing Detective Comics. It caught up with me real fast and the quality wasn't what I demanded of myself," he says.

He continues: "I could've stayed on for a couple more years, but I knew it would be best to take a break and regroup. I've learned you have to say 'no' to things sometimes. It could be in your own best interest."

BATMAN AT HIS BEST

For Tony, the best Batman he's ever drawn was during the R.I.P. story arc with writer Grant Morrison. The partnership between Tony on pencils and Grant weaving a mad storyline began on Batman issue 670, in 2007, with The Resurrection of Ra's al Ghul.

"I couldn't wait to read each script – I wanted to know what the hell was going on!"

That first cover remains one of Tony's favourites, and fans remember this period as one of the greatest in the character's history. With the spontaneity of Grant's plotting matched in Tony's pencils, many put the artist up there right alongside the likes of Frank Miller and Neal Adams in the Batman pantheon.

"That was a magical time for me. I was so into it," says Tony. "I couldn't wait to read each script from Grant, because like every other fan, I wanted to know what the hell was going on! It really was a classic story and I'm so proud to have been a part of it."

If it was this version of Batman that brought Tony into the mainstream, it was an earlier book called The

> “I love being the writer and artist. I do have a greater sense of being the storyteller”

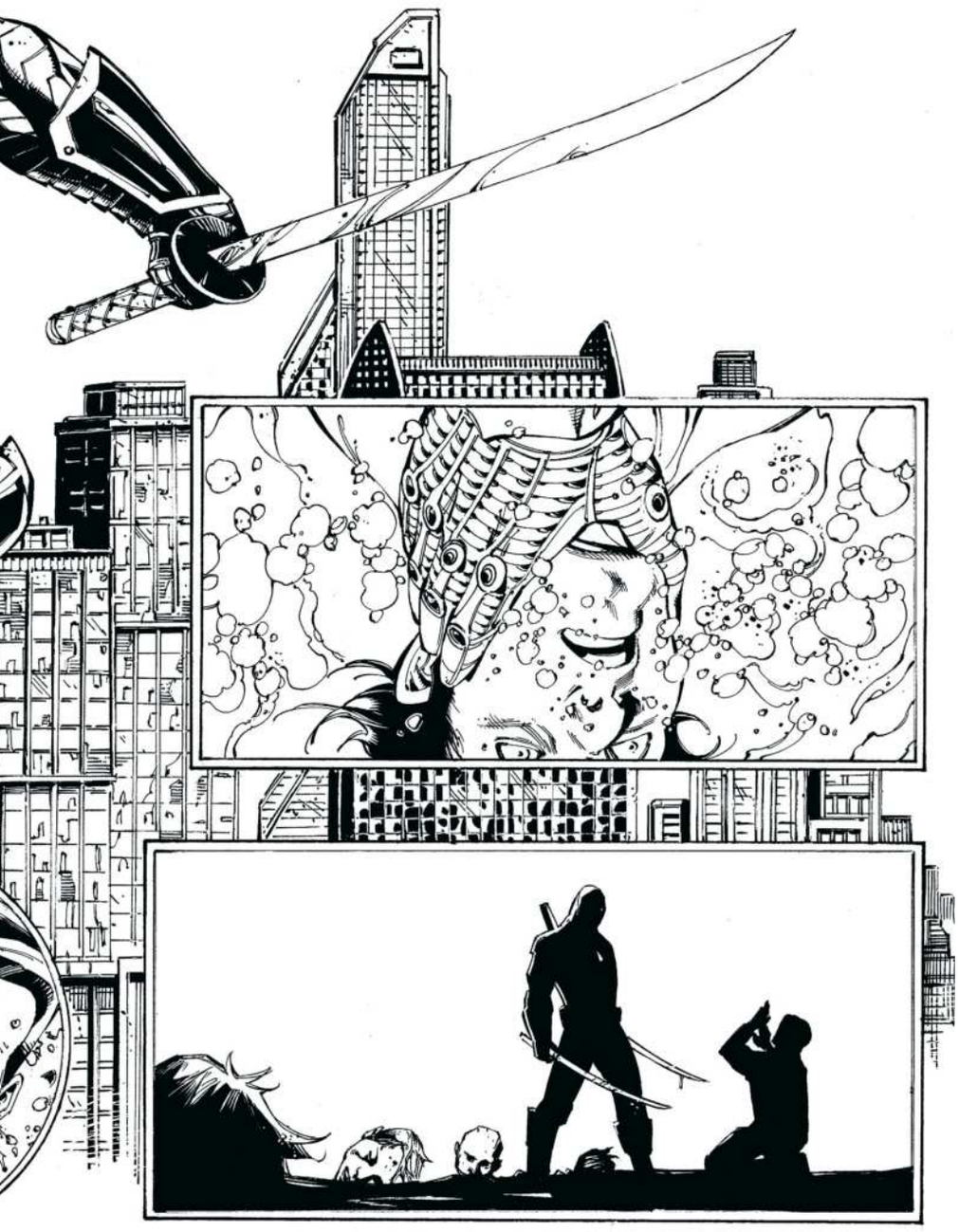


© DC Comics 2016

DEATHSTROKE #1 PANELS

In 2014 Tony Daniel wrote and drew the new series of Deathstroke, about an assassin and mercenary character that he was already used to drawing because it spun out of Teen Titans.





© DC Comics 2008

CONVERGENCE

A variant cover for DC's 2015 weekly, Convergence, with Tony pencilling in a classic team of heroes.



© DC Comics 2015



HEARTS IN DARKNESS

From the R.I.P. storyline, Tony drew this image for Batman issue 681.

LEARNING FROM THE GREATS

Tony talks about his comic art and writing influences...

Every comic artist remembers their early heroes, and for Tony S Daniel two early favourites were John Byrne and Mike Zeck. You might even be able to detect a touch of John's strong, simple forms and clean, direct line work in Tony's artwork today.

His tastes refined somewhat with Barry Windsor-Smith, an artist whose work is more rendered, detailed and nuanced. Tony still remembers buying copies of Machine Man at his local 7-Eleven. Later came the European comic maestros, like Moebius and Liberatore.

"Then Jim Lee and Marc Silvestri came around and changed things up with cool, big images and lots of razzle dazzle. I really got influenced by that, as did most everyone around that time. I started to come into my own a bit later after getting more manga-inspired," says Tony.

Today, he says, there's so much good art around it's not hard to find inspiration. In his opinion, there's more talent around now than 20 years ago when he started out.

When it comes to his writing, influences include Robert Ludlum's thrillers, the noir of Jim Thompson, and Robert Rankin's zany fantasy. "I love JK Rowling," he adds. "She's the one who ignited my passion for reading when the first Harry Potter came out. I read all the books and one day I'd like to read them all again. I can't think of any books I enjoy more than hers."



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© DC Comics 2016

VIOLENT RETRIBUTION

Behold Deathstroke… when Tony drew this he wanted free rein to make it hard and bloody. It's about an assassin, after all.

CLASSIC GOTHAM

A new era of Batman begins with the current series issue 45, as Tony returns on pencils.

Tenth that put him on the map within the comics world. First published in 1997 by Image Comics, Tony owned the IP and The Tenth was a platform for him to both write and draw at the same time. Dynamic and different, it featured young people with supernatural powers, up against Rhazes Darkk and his evil supermonsters. Originally, the plan was for Tony to block out the story and for Beau Smith to write and letter it.

"After the first arc, I realised that I was doing more and more of the writing and dialogue, and thought I'd give it a try. It felt very natural for me,"



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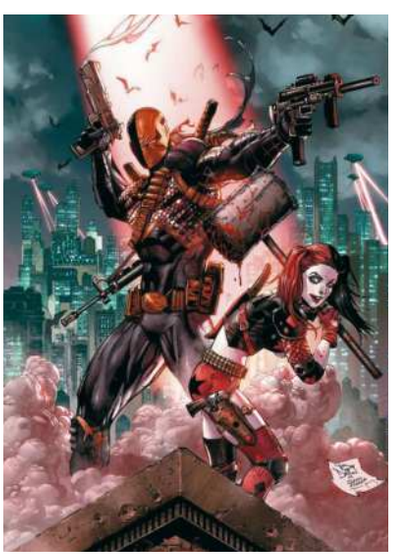
he says. "I love being the writer and artist. I do have a greater sense of being the storyteller, as opposed to being the artist only. I will get back to creator-owned at some point. Maybe next year, I hope. Though there's risks with going down the creator-owned route, I've never shied away from risks."

WRITING ON THE SIDE

After writing and drawing other comics at Image and Dark Horse, Tony was so inspired by the writing side that he took time out of comics to become a screenwriter. Back in the world of comics, although he's written and drawn hits like the Batman story Battle for the Cowl, and relaunched Deathstroke as artist-writer, today he prefers to draw alongside a good writer, and keep his screenwriting going on the side.

At the moment, Tony has his hands full with his current comics. On top of Batman, he's drawing Damage. Although DC already had a character called Damage, to all intents and purposes the current series is a new launch. It's got that directness you expect from a Tony S Daniel comic, with a fresh feel and – literally – a smashing main character.

© DC Comics 2015



"My style has constantly mutated over the years," says Tony. "I don't think I've ever forced a style change – it's always happened slowly, organically. I think I have a mix of realism and cartoonishness that I try to balance. I find that if I go too realistic, the work ends up looking flat."

We'll see if Tony has managed to rein in his 'problematic' realistic drawing tendencies when his Batman series comes out.

OCEANS RISE

When DC started a new run of Justice League in 2016, Tony pencilled Bryan Hitch's story. This stunning work was the opening spread of issue one.

DEATHSTROKE 4

The cover to Tony's fourth issue of Deathstroke, featuring Harley Quinn helping to bring Gotham to its knees.

THE DAMAGE IS DONE

This incredible vertical, mural-esque image features four cover variants for the series Damage, which Tony is currently drawing.



ARTIST PORTFOLIO

KEN LASHLEY

The Canadian artist tells Gary Evans about the Milestone reboot and how "the crazy 90s" changed comics forever

Growing up, what was your dream job? Chances are Ken Lashley does it. The Canadian artist makes comics for Marvel and DC. He does design work for a big toy and games company. And he also draws for the Star Wars franchise: they commissioned him to cover a car with Stormtrooper and lightsaber art.

When Ken thinks of his own childhood, he's always on his way to the local variety store. "To get comics and snacks," he says. "Well, mostly comics. I spent about 90 per cent of my allowance on Marvel comics." He was also into TV cartoons about extraterrestrial characters, like Herculoids, and the Galaxy Trio. He'd draw these characters while they were on-screen and put so much time into it that his mum signed him up for classes in animation.

"I think I went to two classes," Ken says. "I guess I really wasn't an animator, but more an illustrator. I really just wanted to draw things that I liked. Even now, when I get something I'm interested in, it's exciting and the work really flows."

YOU'RE DOING IT WRONG

Ken is a comics veteran with over 25 years in the industry. He's self-taught. He learned by doing it wrong, over and over, until it looked right. He still works that way today. Get him onto the craft, story structure, character development, and he has a lot to teach young artists.

Yet in other ways, Ken talks like he's just starting out in the comic book industry and feels like he has a lot to learn. "My pages are never finished," he says. "I just can't spend 11 hours on a foot. I gotta get rolling." ➳

Artist PROFILE

Ken Lashley
LOCATION: US
FAVOURITE ARTISTS: John Byrne, Barry Windsor-Smith, José Luis García-López, John Buscema and Iain McCaig
MEDIA USED: Pencil and ink
WEB: www.ledkillaboom.com

HAPPY BIRTHDAY!
"This was for a request for someone's 40th birthday. He asked for the craziest fight ever."



© Marvel Comics



FASTER THAN A SPEEDING BULLET
"One of my all-time favourites. Not only was it Superboy, but because it was one of the fastest covers I have ever done. I think the whole piece took three hours."

© DC Comics



HARLEY QUINN

"This was done for fun, and lots of people really enjoy the final look of this. The colourist Juan Fernandez really did a great job on this one."

> Even now, when I get something I'm interested in, it's exciting and the work really flows

©DC Comics



IMAGINEFX COVER
"It's the Panther, my favourite character (well, besides Colossus). It was a great thing to get to draw the classic costume from the 70s."



COLOSSUS AND KITTY
"This one was for a buddy who's a huge X-Men fan. He really wanted something with Colossus and Kitty. I kinda wanted different versions of the characters to do."

© Marvel Comics

Ken got his break when a friend put his portfolio in front of the right people at Marvel. He started out in "the crazy 90s" when there were lots of comics selling lots of copies. His first job was on X-Men offshoot Excalibur.

"I was awful," he says. "I really was too green to do a proper job. The 90s had so many opportunities that don't exist today and because of that, lots of books were being made by people like myself who were young and needed more time to learn the craft of creating comics. But on the flip side of that, you got to see new talent get a shot at books that had high exposure. Imagine, in a month, going from submitting samples to selling 400,000 issues. Crazy."

"It was more about the X-Men characters than the person drawing them"

GETTING INTO CHARACTER

In 1992, some of the biggest illustrators in comics – Todd McFarlane, Rob Liefeld, Jim Lee, and others – left Marvel to start their own publishing company, Image Comics. This, Ken says, changed the way comics were made for good: "It's no secret that when the Image guys left, the comics companies were very wary of making new creators the focus of the books. So it became about the characters. The new hires were there to work on the books. We became interchangeable. It was more about the X-Men characters than the person drawing them.

"I was part of this next wave of creators. No long runs. No spotlights. It was fun, don't get me wrong, but the Image guys really changed how larger companies viewed talent. If I got in



© Marvel Comics

DRAWING AN ICONIC SUPERHERO

Ken reveals how his DC/Milestone project, featuring Icon, came about

1 Jim Lee wants you

"I had to work fast because it was going to be showcased at New York Comic Con 2017. I had a few weeks. I was happy to stay at Marvel, but DC wanted me to be part of the launch and I couldn't refuse a call by the legendary Lee. The panel announcing the new Milestone books took place the first day of the show. So I looked at all the images created of Icon over the years and used them as inspiration."

2 A bald Icon?

"I use many digital tools these days, but drawing in a sketchbook is still my favourite. I can do pretty much anything I want in it. I went for a classic look for this piece: flying with a heroic pose. I spent quite a bit of time on the hair – short, long, dreads, you name it. I even considered bald. I had a few issue with the construction on Icon. The torso is a bit off, but when you have a deadline you've just got to let it go."

3 Just get rolling

"The way I approach a task is very chaotic. I do fairly loose roughs and then just get rolling. I ink myself, so instead of pencilling it all out, I just draw in ink. I know it sounds insane but for me it works. If I make a mistake then I just make it part of the work. If it's really bad I get the white paint out. I did this in about five hours – it's not my best work, but I got it completed and it looked okay for the panel."

4 Secret logo

"Finally, it was decided that Icon needed a logo like all the other superheroes. I went to town on that, but the final look will be saved for issue one. I don't think I have a style. I change it up depending on the project. I think that's smart, but of course it may make it difficult for people to recognise my work off the bat. But I guess my work has a more classic comic look and feel. I work at getting structure right."



THE COMEBACK

Ken puts his own stamp on Icon and Rocket, the superheroes created in 1993 by Milestone Media, a division of DC Comics.



ICON AND ROCKET

The alien traveller Icon teams up with human teenager Rocket to protect the fictional city of Dakota from criminals and other unsavoury riff-raff.



DAKOTAVERSE

Five titles set in the Dakotaverse are due out the this spring. Ken is working on the eponymous Milestone title.

© DC Comics



© DC Comics

THE DARK KNIGHT
"Love drawing the Dark Knight! I really haven't drawn him much in print, so when I got the chance to do it, I went for it."



© IDW Comics

COWABUNGA!
"This was my first time drawing a cover for the Turtles. I loved it – may have been the first time. I don't think it'll be the last."

a few years earlier, I would've had a much different experience."

Ken's workload mean he needs "a ton of time at the table." He gets up at 9am and works until 11pm, with short breaks for food or the gym. Old posters hang on the walls. Robots and vintage toys lie about his workspace in London, Ontario. Sketches and markers and papers cover the drawing side of the room.

He prefers his sketchbook, but these days works digitally too. His Cintiq tablet sits on another desk and he also uses 11x17-inch scanner. "It's a hot mess when I'm on deadline," he says. "Well, it's always a hot mess really!"

WORKING RELATIONSHIPS

Ken splits his time 60/40 between comics and design. As well as Marvel and DC, he also works for toy and board game company Hasbro, and Lucasfilm. The work he does in any industry is defined by his relationship with the art director. Hasbro, like Lucasfilm, lets "creatives be creative." The comic book business is a bit different, though. Here, the writer dictates the vision so Ken doesn't have





© Marvel Comics

the same level of input. Sometimes he's hired to do nothing but draw. He has no say on story, and in the past he's quit projects for that reason.

DC recently rebooted the Milestone universe. Ken works with Reggie Hudlin, a writer who does give him the chance to make the story his own – everything from overall direction to character costumes. Ken draws the superheroes Icon and Rocket. He fills several sketchbooks when starting a new projects. It's always better to have too much material than not enough.

FAST AND RIGHT

"The history on this page came from the many amazing past creators of the X-Men title. It took me a while to get it completed – say about three days. I'm fast, but I wanted it to be right."

"My desk is a hot mess when I'm on deadline. Well, it's always a hot mess really!"

So he sketches quickly, refining later, and tries multiple designs for each character. "It's important to push past what's expected and see where it goes," he says. "On Icon and Rocket, I did a bunch of designs that range from classic comic book to over-the-top crazy stuff. I landed somewhere in between the two extremes."

THE THRILL OF THE STORY

Ken says you need several things to make a good story. One is unpredictability. Another is what he calls "peril within peril." Take Star Wars: Luke must destroy the Death Star, and only a precise hit on a small thermal exhaust port will do it, and that's an almost impossible shot, and he needs to make that shot before ➳



© Lucasfilm

NEW LOOK FOR REY

"I was approached Hasbro about creating some new looks for Rey. The final look was a cross between this and development work done by a few other artists."

A LONG TIME AGO IN A COMIC-CON FAR, FAR AWAY...

Ken really came into his own as an artist while vandalising a Volkswagen Passat in front of the crowds at San Diego's Comic-Con

"By 2011, I was working for lots of different companies, but my Lucasfilm job was my favourite. I received a call to draw live on a 2012 Volkswagen Passat at San Diego Comic-Con International. It became one the most rewarding and scary jobs that I've ever worked on.



MAULED
The car Ken inked at San Diego Comic-Con was later auctioned to support a charity.

I was tasked with drawing images from the six movies. It was a lot more difficult then I had anticipated. The surface of the car had been wet sanded previously, but absorbed the materials I brought with me – all except my Sharpie. I went through 36 Sharpies that weekend.

My highlight was one of my good friends at Hasbro – actually, he is a lead art director – came over and brought me a drink. That's what I mean about having great friendships in the art business. It's really more about the people you work with.

But I also realised that I didn't need reference after about the first hour. Because I'm a Star Wars junkie, I knew enough to get the right look. I really grew as an artist that weekend. I gained a ton of confidence. After that, there was no looking back. So many awesome celebrities came by for photos with me and the car."





PARK IT
It took Ken two days straight to cover the specially prepared Volkswagen Passat with illustrations of key moments from the Star Wars films.



STAYING SHARP
Ken works with one of the 36 Sharpies he used to complete the four-wheeled artwork.

BRAND NAME
"It's not every day that you get to draw a toy blister packing for some the best heroes in comics."



© Marvel Comics and Hasbro

DARTH VADER
"This was done for the Star Wars Celebration in Anaheim. It was meant to be an emotional shot of Vader as he wrecked havoc on Coruscant."



© Lucasfilm



© Marvel Comics

HOMAGE

"This is the variant cover for the Ghost Rider title. It was a homage to the classic X-Men #1, which showcased the new X-Men taking over. I replaced the X-Men with magic-users."

THE HAND THAT SPOKE

"I was tasked with doing an image for a charity poster as a giveaway. It may have been one the first time in years that I actual drew and inked Spider-Man. I really liked the hand – not sure why, but it spoke to me."



© Marvel Comics

the Death Star kills everyone at the rebel base. When you stack peril on top of peril in this way, it causes tension – and tension is what keeps us hooked.

Ken also believes in keeping a character true to themselves. "Nothing," he says, "is more frustrating then when characters do things not in their nature." But there is an exception to this: at a crucial point in the story, usually the end, a character should make an unexpected choice. It shows change, how a character starts a story one way and ends it another. "That's a clever twist, when used properly, " Ken says, "but it can be annoying if not. I really enjoy working on stories where the main character has to go through some kind of growth. And a relatable character is also a must."

STAYING SANE

Story rules are important in comics, but Ken also applies them to toy design. A comic he illustrates could sell 50,000 copies. But his recent Darth Vader illustration appeared on the packaging for 700 different kinds of toys, millions of individual items. The difference is, in toy art, the artist remains anonymous. Ken recently spotted a child wearing a T-shirt with his drawing on it. Unlike comics, the image didn't carry his name. What he likes is the balance that working between the two industries brings: "It keeps me sane."

He stopped reading reviews of his work years ago. Good or bad comments have little to do with his day-to-day process. Either way, they do him no good. Ken's a bit of purist in that way. He's happy drawing for different industries as long as they let him do what he does best: be creative. The art is in the doing of it and everything else is just background noise. That's why he was happy sketching the Galaxy Trio as a kid, but didn't like formal animation classes. He just wants to get that flow going. He just wants to get rolling.

"I think what ties my work together is the energy: I try to put lots of it into my work"

"I'm nowhere near perfect," he says. "But I try. I think what ties my work together is the energy: I try to put lots of it into my work. To be honest, I really try and draw things I would love to see. I have a long way to go, but I'm always working on my craft."



ARTIST PORTFOLIO

FIONA STAPLES

The hottest artist in comics today talks to us about *Saga*, her drawing past and her future prospects...

"My favourite character is Special Agent Gale because he's a sarcastic jerk. Almost everything he says is pretty mean, and I relish drawing those expressions," says Fiona Staples, probably the hottest artist in comics today.

She's talking about a pale, bat-winged spy character in *Saga*. After over 30 issues of the smash hit indie title, the comic she created with writer Brian K Vaughan has won her 17 trophies: Eisners, Harveys and more.

Saga is the tale of star-crossed lovers Alana and Marko, and their baby daughter Hazel. The couple come from different sides in a galactic war and when their treachery is discovered, it seems just about everybody in the universe is out to get them. As the title suggests, it's an epic tale of love and war across the stars.

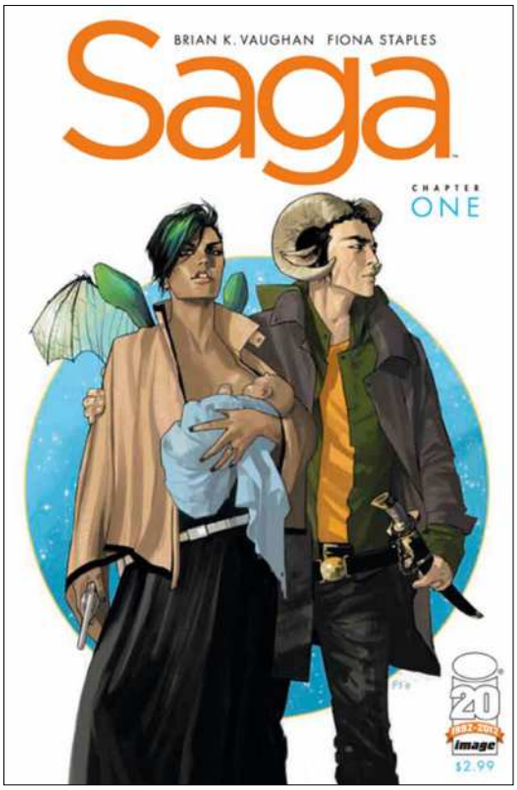
Fiona doesn't seem as interested in the main characters as some of the quirkier ones. Another of her favourites is the horned grandma, Klara. Stern, cranky and brutal… Klara's happy to spill blood to protect her family. And Fiona also enjoys drawing bounty hunter The Brand.

"With The Brand, I mainly just wanted to draw a woman who's sexy in an atypical way. Brian wrote this very cool, self-assured freelancer and I thought it would be great to have her look suave and masculine-presenting," she says.

WORKING AS EQUALS

Her working relationship with writer Brian K Vaughan is as good as it can get, and she has as much input as she wants. She regards him as a bigger name in the industry – he does have about ten years more experience than she does – but she feels she's always treated as an equal. They both co-own the title, which is published by Image Comics.

With its big themes of family, revenge and redemption and its extreme plot twists, *Saga* could so easily have been a dark and gritty affair. But Fiona draws it with a light touch, using bright and lively colours. It's refreshingly unmasculine, and that ➤➤



THE BEGINNING OF AN EPIC SAGA
Saga issue one introduced the star-crossed lovers Alana and Marko, and their baby Hazel, who narrates parts of the story



BLOWING A GALE
Special Agent Gale's cutting verbal style and violence make him one of Fiona's favourites to draw

Artist PROFILE

Fiona Staples
LOCATION: Canada
FAVOURITE ARTISTS: James Harren, Sean Murphy, Daniel Warren, Johnson, Amy Reeder, Tommy Lee Edwards
SOFTWARE USED: Photoshop and Manga Studio
WEB: www.fionastaples.com

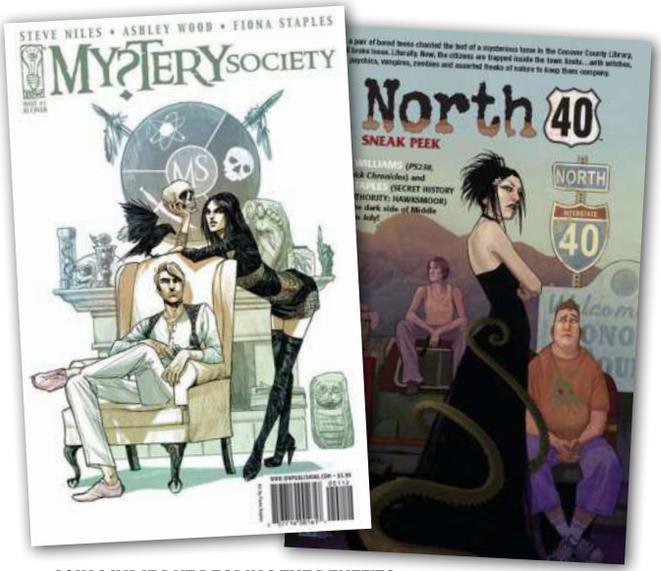
KIDNAP
Will this robot, with a television for a head, pay the price of absconding with the toddler Hazel, in issue 25 of Saga?



“I don’t know where the *Saga* story is headed long-term, so I just take it month by month!”



MYSTERY SOCIETY
Working with Steve Niles and Ashley Wood on Mystery Society was a dream come true for Fiona



GOING INDIE BUT REAPING THE BENEFITS
While DC owned 100 per cent of North 40, moving to Mystery Society, Fiona was able to retain a 25 per cent royalty on the artwork – vital for the up-and-coming artist

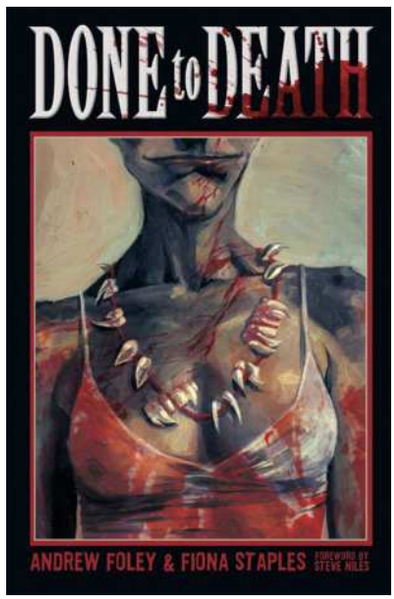
might just be why every issue is so eye-catching, with her watercolour-esque digital art on the cover.

Saga's success has spelled bigger things – if it's possible to get bigger than *Saga* itself. Fiona also drew the revival of *Archie*, with its all-American retro hero Archie Andrews and his friends Betty and Veronica. Dating back to 1939, the title has huge resonance in the US and its publisher revived it with Mark Waid writing.

For Fiona, the process is a little different to *Saga*. She explains: "I do full-colour work for *Saga*, and Archie is coloured by Andre Szymanowicz. This was meant to save me time, but it still takes me longer to draw Archie because everything has to look somewhat realistic. A car has to look like a real car and a school has to look like a school. In *Saga* I'd just draw some stupid dome thing or flying fruit."

Archie was the seventh best-selling comic when the new issue 1 came out in July

GIVING A TOOTHY GRIN
Fiona Staples refers to her first comic, Done To Death, with its dark humour, as Mile One in her career



> "I'm hoping creator-owned books become a viable option"

2015, beating the likes of *The Amazing Spider-Man*, *Justice League*, *The Walking Dead* and Marvel's Princess Leia. Yet the huge popularity that Fiona experienced hasn't ended up going to her head. Growing up in Calgary and attending the Alberta School of Art and Design, the Eisner award is something she dreamed of winning. Now that she has one, she points to other artists who she thinks have more skill. She loves James Harren, Sean Murphy and Daniel Warren Johnson, for instance.

"I know that it's kind of 'my moment' right now, and the temptation is to strike while the iron is hot and put my name on as many projects as possible," she says. "But it was *Saga* that got me here, and I'm not going to jeopardise that series by taking other jobs, Archie being the exception. So that's what it's like: exercising will power and saying no to a lot more things!"

TEN YEARS IN THE MAKING

The huge respect she's receiving at the moment hasn't come out of the blue, and she's been working hard for a decade. Her first comic was *Done To Death*, which appeared in 2006 and featured a nerdy vampire and a homicidal book editor. She took it on when she was still studying, drawing on acetate with a crow quill.

Another of her highlights is *North 40*, written by Aaron Williams, which featured monsters in small town America. By then she was 100 per cent digital, emulating watercolour and using textures for a mixed media feel. It's got some of the hallmarks

HOW SAGA COMES TO LIFE

The epic space drama of love and war has become a hit, thanks to Fiona's exceptional art



Working alongside writer Brian K Vaughan, Fiona Staples is the artist behind *Saga*, one of the most eclectic and unusual comics you're ever likely to read. It's creator-owned, and perhaps that's the reason it ever saw the light of day.

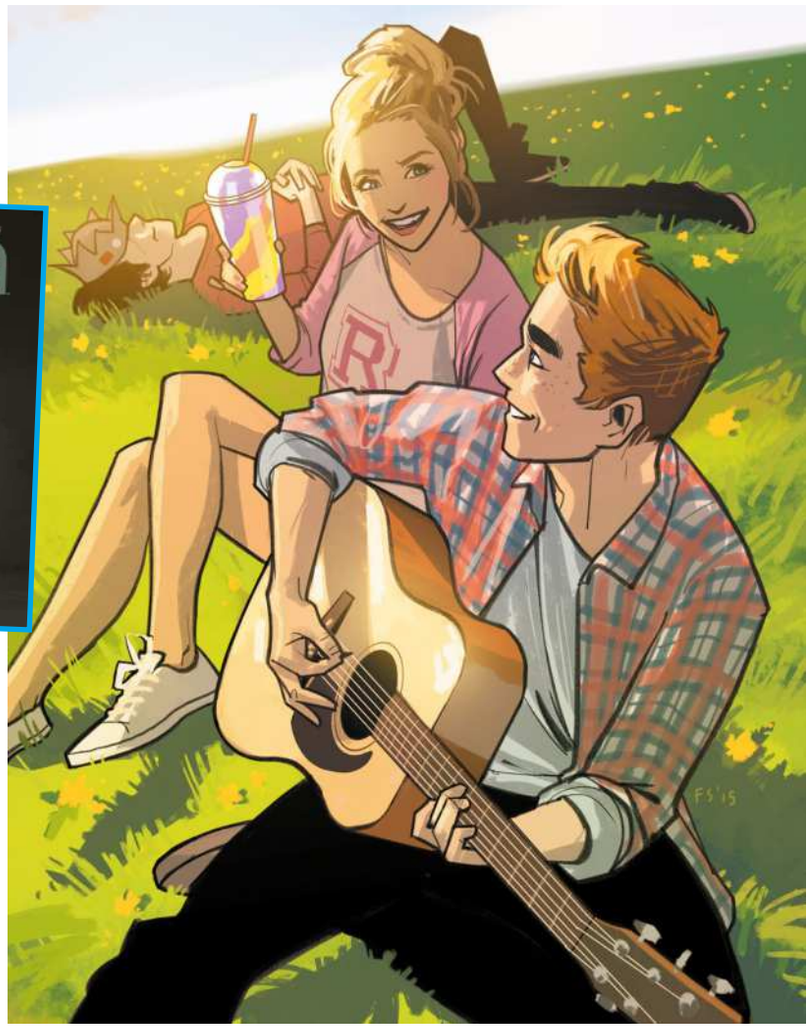
"I never felt like a hired gun. All *Saga* decisions are made by both of us, from scheduling to foreign edition deals to T-shirt designs," says Fiona.

"I don't know exactly where the story is headed long-term, so I just take it month by month! Hazel is growing up fast, and the rest of the family is ageing a bit as well, less obviously. I try to have their appearance reflect their circumstances. The last story arc saw the family separated, and Marko and Alana looking pretty haggard. When we come back to them they're going to be more in adventure mode."

Like her other comics, *Saga* is drawn digitally using Photoshop and Manga Studio. "I love being able to work in colour, instead of having to scan in inks and colour afterwards. Digital is freeing to me, because I can get the image in my mind onto the screen with very little interference. For instance, I can pick a colour with a click instead of washing my paintbrush and mixing the colour on a palette every time. I can paint white-on-black as easily as black-on-white. There are no physical barriers to worry about," she says.



GOING UP IN THE WORLD OF SAGA
The Brand (wearing the tie) and her young ward Sophie (glasses) embark on a climb in issue 29 of Saga





ARCHIE
This title couldn't be more different to Saga in so many ways, and won praise from critics and readers alike.

ROCK STAR
An uncoloured centre-spread from the first issue of Archie

later seen in *Saga*, and came out through the DC imprint *Wildstorm*.

In 2010, Mystery Society came along and in it Fiona worked similarly to how she does now. "This book is significant because it's when I moved back to doing creator-owned work. I'd spent a few years doing work-for-hire for various companies and didn't mind, but I wanted at least a percentage of what I came up with," she says.

And perhaps that's one of the most inspiring things about Fiona's approach to comics. Not only has she been leading the way with unusual and thought-provoking artwork, she takes risks and wants to take ownership of what she creates – not sell it off to one of the big boys in the market.

"I know books like *Saga* are the exception, and most indie books can't be sustained for long, much less counted on to be profitable. But I'm hoping this will change and creator-owned books become a viable option for more creators.

"The more the market grows, the more indie titles publishers like Image, Dynamite and Boom will be able to sustain, so I think it's crucial to make accessible comics for a wide range of tastes," she concludes. END

WORKSHOPS

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Liam Sharp and Laura Martin show how to create and colour a dynamic comic spread

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Julian Totino Tedesco creates an image that's both appealing as an illustration and functional as a cover

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Ken Lashley's stunning line art is brought to life by colourist Juan Fernandez, who shares his techniques

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Arthur Mask creates characters with different body types tied together with coherent style and colour

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Your comic art questions and conundrums solved by our panel of expert artists


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GET YOUR RESOURCES
How-to video tutorials, custom brushes and more! See page 146

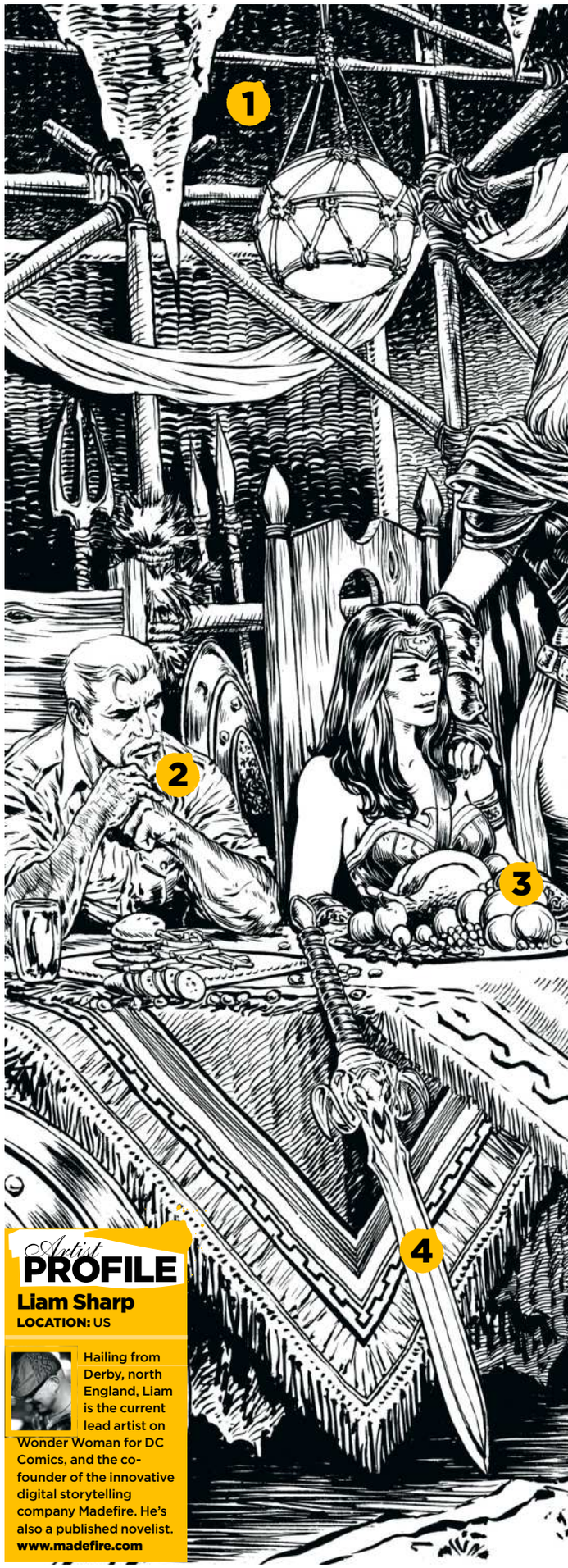

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PEN & PHOTOSHOP

CREATE A COMIC SPREAD

LIAM SHARP pencils a Wonder Woman spread, then **LAURA MARTIN** adds the colour (see overleaf)...

This spread from *Wonder Woman: The Lies* had a lot of work to do! It had to establish, to the informed reader at least, that this was not the real Themyscira, the island paradise former home of our heroine, but rather an elaborate fake. Meanwhile, Wonder Woman herself had to be slightly dazed and uncertain – wanting to believe she's home, but somehow holding back. The spread had to feel rich and evolved as an environment, but also suggest clues to its true nature…



1 ISUAL NARRATIVE CLUES

Themyscira is a highly evolved, civilised paradise, so making the shelter behind the queen's table so crude is a giveaway that this isn't the real Themyscira, instead someplace more barbaric.

2 A DOUBTING STEVE

Wonder Woman's love interest Steve Trevor feels doubt. He's the only mortal male to have visited Themyscira, knows this isn't it, but isn't sure how to break it to Diana. I put burger and fries in front of him – a cynical slight.

3 CREATING ATMOSPHERE

I want to achieve a scene of a bustling feast in a medieval-type setting. Food on crude tables hidden by layers of material, hastily erected shelters.

4 MORE SIGNS AND CLUES

The sword has a horned skull motif that suggests possible involvement from Ares, the god of war, and Diana's nemesis. Weapons wouldn't ordinarily be on display in Themyscira, but here there are shields, spears, and a trident.

5 A SENSE OF TEXTURE

I primarily use brush and ink. I like to create a sense of texture, suggesting the various materials and surfaces as well as ambient depth – created by using finer lines in the distance.



6 A SURPRISE INCLUSION

It's quite common to have peacocks around fantasy environments because they suggest splendour. But I wanted to draw the anti-peacock and immediately thought of a dodo!

7 WHAT'S MISSING?

Themyscira is shown here as a tumble-down medieval-type city, not the progressive paradise it's thought to be. There's no sign that its denizens are innovative, modern builders in a progressive, civilised society.

8 ANOTHER DISCREPANCY

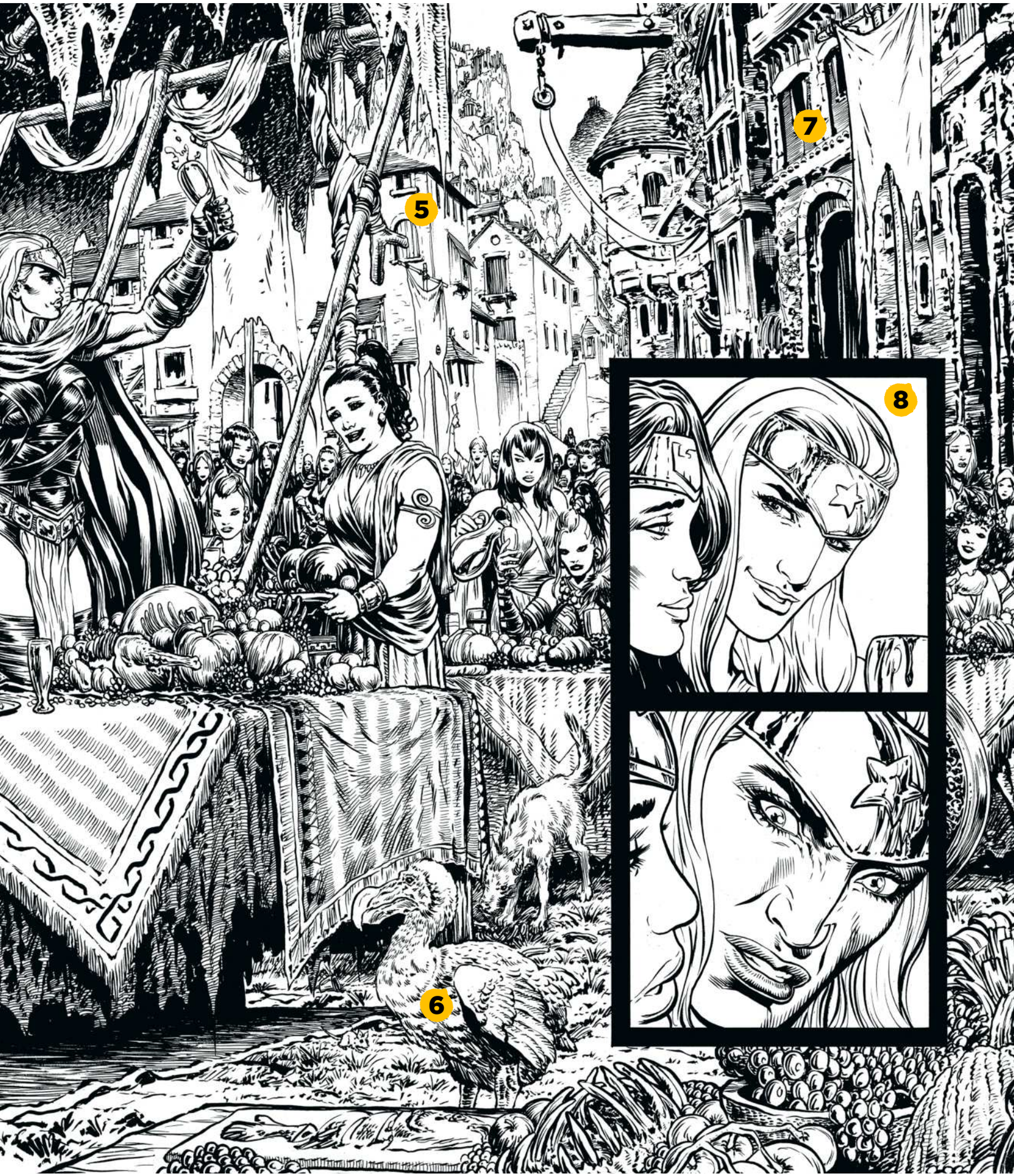
Hippolyta is the queen of the Amazons. Back in *Year One*, we established her as raven-haired and Mediterranean looking. But here she is blonde and based on an alternative iteration.

Artist PROFILE

Liam Sharp

LOCATION: US

Hailing from Derby, north England, Liam is the current lead artist on Wonder Woman for DC Comics, and the co-founder of the innovative digital storytelling company Madefire. He's also a published novelist. **www.madefire.com**


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Help! How do I enhance storytelling, draw attention to main plot points, and lead the eye through the page, all at the same time? I read Greg's script and talked with Liam about overall mood. We wanted a strong, high-contrast palette, more cinematic than realistic. I chose a colour scheme of hot versus cold. Red, yellow, peach, gold, pink and burgundy focus light and attention on to the main characters. The mood is of fervent gluttony, in a frame of a cold, slightly off-kilter space.

1 LIGHT SOURCE

This globe is the primary and only light source. I choose a bright yellow light with a limited range, to concentrate the visual energy on to the main characters.

2 ADDING NARRATIVE

Steve is an outsider, a point driven home by his military-green shirt. The actual colour is much closer to golden brown – it's only because of the surrounding colour scheme that it appears to look green.

3 DEAD AS A...

When I saw the dodo, I understood its significance as a clue that this isn't the real Themyscira. I do some dodo research before colouring and use a yellow highlight on its body.

4 A SENSE OF PERSPECTIVE

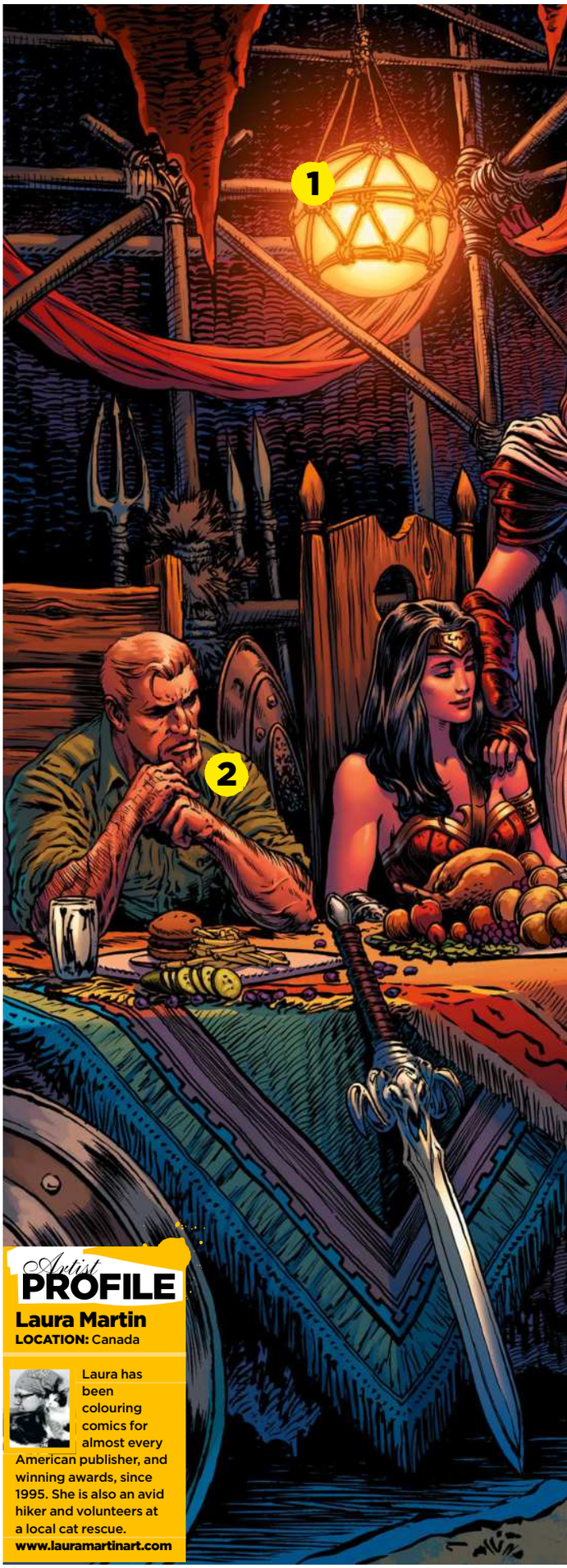
There's great depth of field, and colour can put it into perspective. I choose the focal point, emphasise it with the most contrast in hue or value, and allow planes to 'recede' by cooling colours.

5 HOLD THE DETAIL

It would be very easy for a colourist to get lost in rendering every little face and hand. However, too much colour detail would confuse the overall composition, so I keep the smaller figures in almost flat colour.

6 PLAY WITH EMOTIONS

The emotion has changed significantly between panels, so I accentuate Hippolyta's scowl and shadow Diana's face to suggest she's still in the dark.



How I introduce...

CINEMATIC DRAMA





1 Shapes take shape

The first step is flatting, or breaking down the image into separate colours (subcontracted to Chris Garcia – thanks!). Colour choices don't matter here, as long as each shape is a different colour to adjacent shapes.

2 Colour scheme

I establish the overall colour scheme and change flat colours to base colours, or darkest versions of the colours I will eventually use. This prevents me from going too dark, which could obscure the line-art.



3 Adding details

I use the Brush tool to paint details, add secondary lighting and create surface textures. I also add special effects on separate layers. Here there's a colour hold on the whites of Hippolyta's eyes, and a slight shine on her silver crown.

Artist PROFILE

Laura Martin
LOCATION: Canada

Laura has been colouring comics for almost every American publisher, and winning awards, since 1995. She is also an avid hiker and volunteers at a local cat rescue.
www.lauramartinart.com


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PHOTOSHOP & PAINTER

PLANNING A SUPERHERO COVER

JULIAN TOTINO TEDESCO walks us through the process of creating an image that's both appealing as an illustration and functional as a cover.

Artist PROFILE

Julian Totino Tedesco

LOCATION: Argentina



Julian is a freelance illustrator working mainly doing comic book covers for clients such as Marvel, Dark Horse and DC.

http://ifxm.ag/j-tedesco

All images © Marvel

Creating a cover, whether it's for a book, a magazine or a comic book, involves much more than just picking a nice image. A cover serves a purpose, and therefore there's a lot of things you need to have in mind before starting to draw. In this case, I'll show you how I design and create an effective comic-book cover – a superhero comic-book cover, to be more specific.

There are a few things you have to keep in mind when it comes to superheroes, and the first is that they're usually all about dynamism and power. You'll find a few exceptions out there, of course, but most times, that's what an editor seeks on covers of this genre (and I assume that's what the audience wants, as well).

Another thing you should have in mind is that there are hundreds of issues being released every week, and they're all displayed next to each other, whether on the shelves or in a catalogue, so your image should have a clear and readable composition. It must be eye-catching, even from a distance or in a small thumbnail, so it can stand out and grab the potential buyers' interest.

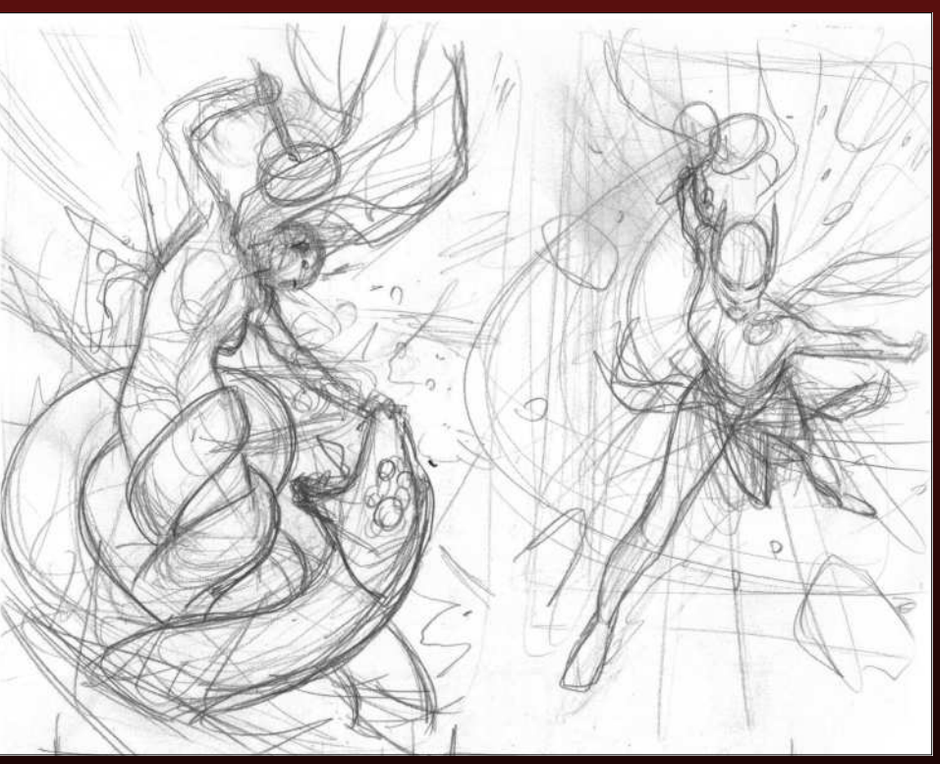
All of these things can be achieved through thoughtful use of composition, tone and colour. I'll show you how I use these elements in my work.

I'm not saying this is the only way to do a superhero cover – and I encourage you to play and experiment with other ways – but this is a formula that has proven to be successful for years, and that we'll explore in this workshop.

GET YOUR RESOURCES SEE PAGE 146

1 Searching for references

The first thing I do when I get my assignment – in this case, a powerful image of a female Thor – is to search for references of the subject. Google is the obvious tool for this. These images help me understand what she looks like, what's her attitude, her weapons, her powers, etc. This way I can do an accurate portrait of her that can reflect her world and personality.





2 Doodling ideas

Once I'm familiarised with the subject I begin noting ideas in my sketchbook. Every cover I've ever done has started here. I draw everything I think could work. This is the time to let the ideas flow, the more the better. This way I can see which would work better – or won't work at all. Doodling has this retroactive effect, in which the more I draw, the more ideas and concepts come to my mind.







3 Polishing your doodles

I choose two or three doodles, those I consider the best, and scan them. Then I create a file in Photoshop the size of the published art and start cleaning and painting the sketches. This is the most important part of a cover, I'd say. It's like the foundation of a house: if it doesn't work, everything falls apart. Another important thing is to ask your editor what space the title and credits on the cover will take. You'll see in a moment why this is important!

SHORTCUTS

Copy all layers

Cmd+Shift+C (Mac)

Crtl+Shift+C (PC)

Make a selection, then use this shortcut to copy all visible layers without having to merge them.




PRO SECRETS

ENHANCING THE TEXTURE

When finishing an illustration, I often apply the Smart Sharpen filter (Filter > Sharpen > Smart Sharpen). I set the values according the needs of the image. It's an effective way to make the image look more focused and enhance the brush strokes and textures.

4 Working with the feedback

After I send in the sketches, my editor points out that we won't have enough space for the many blocks of text required on the cover. Didn't I tell you? If I'd asked that beforehand, I would have worked the composition in a different way. Now that I know exactly what space is available, I can do a couple of sketches that would fit much better.



5 Drawing the cover

Once the editor selects a sketch, I start with the drawing. Usually, as in this case, I work with pencils on an 11x17-inch sheet of Strathmore Bristol Vellum Surface paper. I start drawing with a black Prismacolor Col-Erase and once I'm happy with the proportions and the overall look, I finish it with a mechanical pencil. I use a 0.5 and 0.3.



SHORTCUTS

Rotate View

R (Mac & PC)

Easily access the Rotate tool and rotate the canvas to help you paint those curves comfortably. I use it constantly.

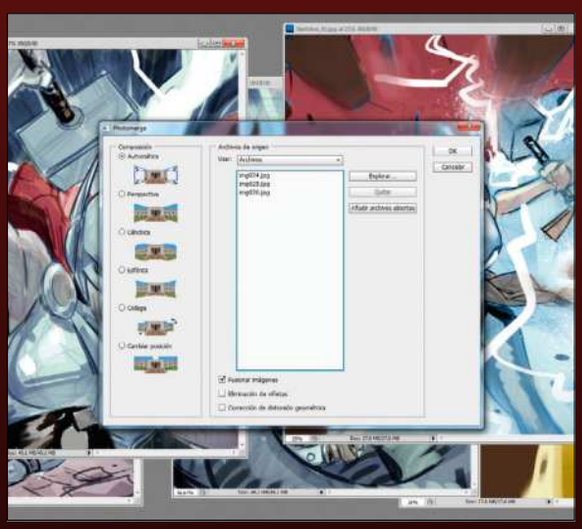
PRO SECRETS

BLENDING EDGES

The Blender tool in Painter is a great tool to mix and blend the tones on your painting, making it look more organic and real. You'll need to flatten all of your layers to make it work properly, though. It's a very interesting tool to experiment over your finished images, especially if you're after an oil-like effect.

6 Making your own rules

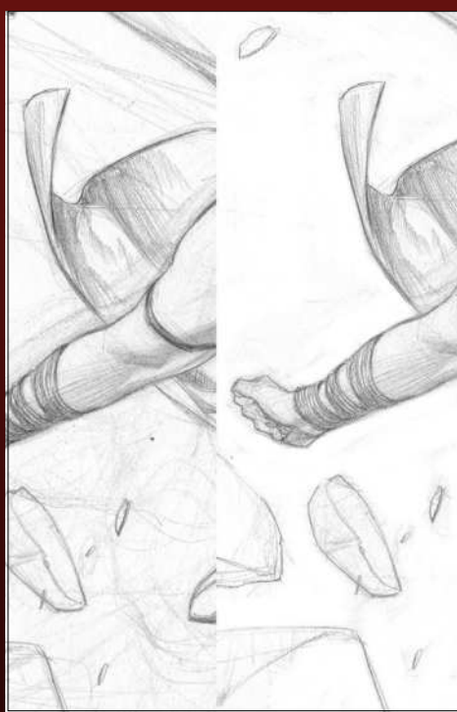
When you create an image, you make the rules. This means that you can (and should) choose to play with the elements of the cover in the way you want or need to. In this case, the cape, rocks, arms, legs, background, everything points to the main character's face, the focal point of the image. You can even add elements to the image just for this purpose.



7 Scanning the pencil art

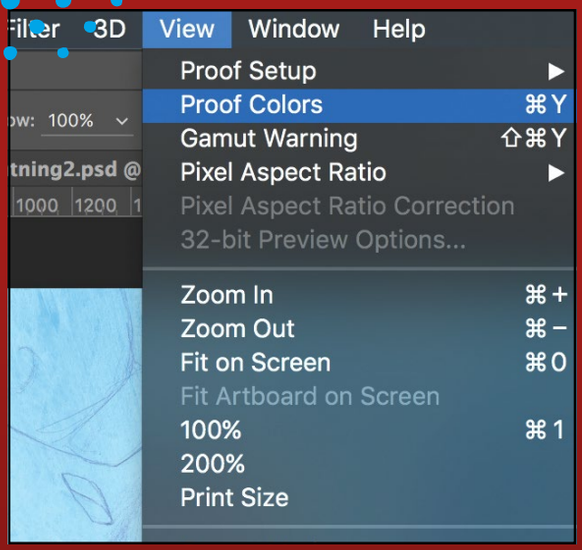
I scan the pencil art at 600dpi in three parts (you don't actually need it that big, I just like to keep my originals at a huge resolution) and let Photoshop work its magic using File > Automate > Photomerge. Select the three scanned files, choose the Auto option for Layout, then let Photoshop do all the work.





8 Editing the pencil art

Once I have the files all merged and the image completed, I adjust the contrast using Image > Adjustments > Levels. Then, I clean my pencils, but just a little bit – I like some roughness and texture in my work. Here, I will just remove some of the information in the background with the eraser, but I'm leaving lots of spaces with "dirt". Anything that brings an "organic" element to my work, I use it.



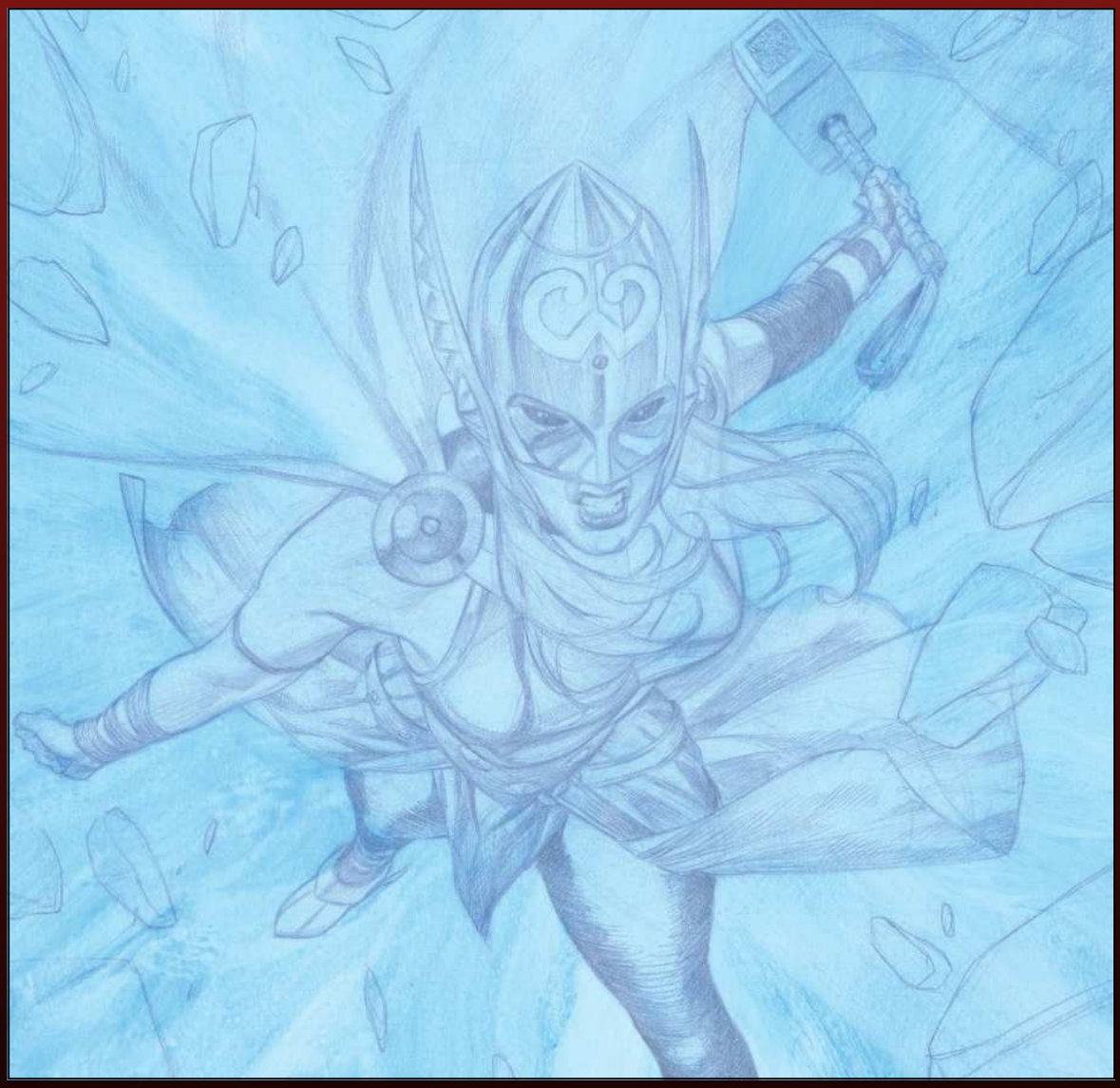
9 Creating the document

I work on a 400dpi RGB file, usually slightly bigger than the printed size. Although I work in RGB , I'm always using the Proof Colors option (in the View menu). This way I can work with the advantages of RGB mode but be aware of what the result will be in CMYK, which is the mode in which I'll send the final art to the publisher.

10 The initial kick

I set the pencil layer to Multiply blending mode, so I can paint on layers both above and beneath the pencil art. I set the layer opacity to around 40 per cent, so once I start adding colours, the pencil lines will "blend" with the colours and will look integrated. Using Hue/Saturation (Ctrl+U) I colorise the pencil art according the colour scheme I have in mind. Then I add a texture at the bottom of the layer stack that purposely points to the focal point of the image. I did this texture in acrylics and scanned it.





PRO SECRETS

HELPING YOUR COMPUTER

Some brushes are very heavy and can slow down your computer, affecting the flow of your brush stroke. If you're not working on detailed line work but instead painting with textured brush strokes, you can decrease your file's DPI a bit while working (but don't go below 200dpi), then change it back once you're finished and apply the Smart Sharpen filter. You have to be careful to not push it too much, but it really helps.

WORKSHOP BRUSHES

PHOTOSHOP CUSTOM BRUSHES:



ERASER SOFT TEXTURE

I use this constantly to erase parts of my brush strokes or to fade general areas. The texture adds a nice organic touch.



GENERAL SPLATTER

Great to get a general texture – a rough surface, an explosion, etc. Here I've used it for the rocks and the lightning.



THICK & THIN

Like a watercolour brush, but can be used either opaque or semi-transparent, which makes it very versatile. Great organic feel.



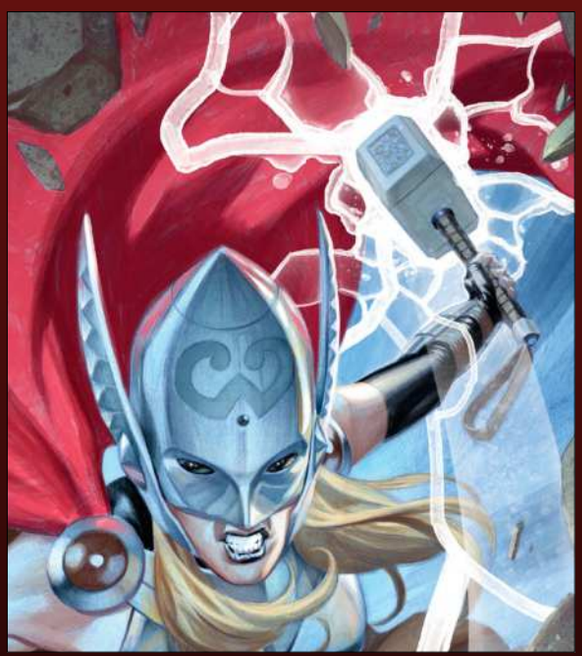
11 Starting to paint

I start blocking the darker shadows using a brush made by Kyle T. Webster called "Thick & Thin". This brush is not completely opaque, and I also set the layers' opacity to around 70 per cent so the colours blend with the blue of the background, creating a harmonious colour scheme.



12 Building volume

I continue painting, adding more layers of semi-transparent colours, creating volume and drawing with the colours. I create layers constantly, but I merge them as I go – I try to have as few layers as possible. Along with the brush, I use a soft textured eraser to correct and fade my strokes when needed. I keep trying to push the viewer's eye to the focal point, adding motion lines in the background and keeping the warmer tones closer to her face.



13 The lightning

At this point I start painting on new layers over the pencil, in a more opaque way. When adding the lightning (which I'll leave on a separate layer) I realise that in order to make it brighter I need to make the background and general tones a bit darker. For this I use a few adjustment layers such as Levels and Brightness/Contrast.



14 Finishing touches

For the effects on the rocks and the lightning I use a brush that I made out of the texture of a splatter. Once everything is done, I open the file in Painter and blend some parts of the image with a tool called Blender. Notice how the image loses contrast as it moves away from the focal point. Like the composition lines and the colours, contrast is another efficient way to keep the viewer's eyes were we want. END

ARTIST INSIGHT

15 TECHNIQUES FOR COLOURING COMICS

DAVE MCCAIG reveals the tricks and tips that he uses with colour to add extra layers of storytelling to black and white comic book art

Artist PROFILE

Dave McCaig

LOCATION: Canada

Award-winning Dave has spent over 20 years working with every major US comic publisher. He was also the colour supervisor on The Batman animated series.

http://ifxm.ag/d-mccaig



Colouring comics is the best job in the art world, as far as I'm concerned, because it leans heavily towards the fun part of art: the storytelling.

Colour can take a reader by the hand and lead them through pacing and mood, guide their eye to where it needs to go, and flesh out details in materials and lighting to suit the story. It's kind of like being the cinematographer and soundtrack composer for a film all in one.

The trick to successful colouring is to think about what's going on beyond the panels of the page, and have those outside elements and motivations influence the things we can see. That can mean a million different things. Maybe it's blazing hot outside. Maybe the environment your story takes place in is bleached by the sun and is as old as time. Maybe the journey of the characters involved takes monotonous hours.

Colour can help sell all of that, which can greatly expand the scope of a comic, turning each panel from a two-dimensional drawing into a window to a rich, nuanced world.

1 WHY USE COLOUR?

This might seem like an inane question, but it's worth thinking about what benefits colour can bring to an illustration that black and white can't. Colour can convey things like mood, time of day, change of scene, image planes and depth of field. It can be a great visual shorthand to help a reader grasp what's going on, without hammering them over their head with dialogue or having to draw absolutely everything in a scene – when something as simple as a yellow background and blue shadows can tell you that it's sunrise.



2 SOFTWARE OPTIONS

Until recently, Photoshop was the de facto software used in comic book colouring, but Clip Studio Paint has been changing that. Clip is much faster with some tasks like laying in flat colours, primarily due to its advanced Paint Bucket tolerance settings that auto-trap and detect line gaps when filling inked shapes. A huge time saver! That said, I still prefer the brushes available in Photoshop for rendering. Beyond the desktop, I'll sometimes work on my iPad Pro using either Clip or Procreate as well.

Photoshop | Clip Studio Paint | Procreate

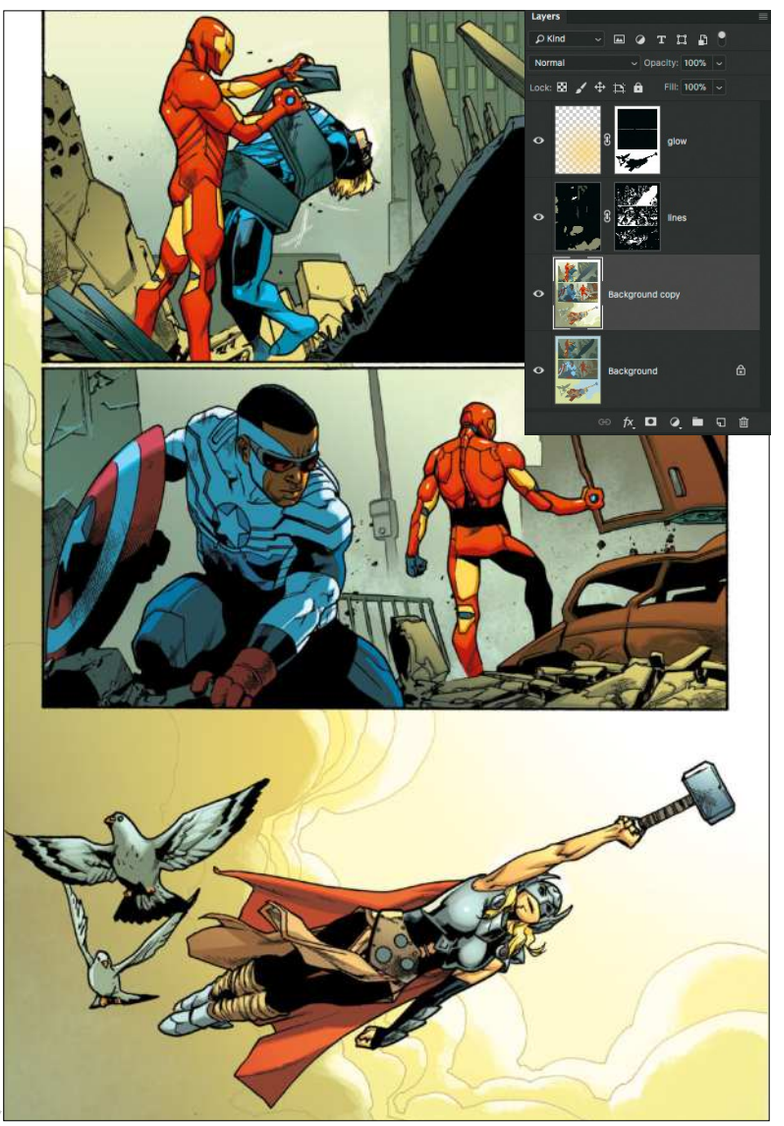




3 STARTING WITH FLAT COLOURS

Laying in "flats" is a standard step for colourists in the US comic industry. Flatting is the process in which flat, contiguous, aliased shapes are laid in on a separate layer from the line art to facilitate selecting areas when rendering. Like most colourists, I usually subcontract this step to a professional flatter to save time, and once I get a batch of flats back I'll go over them all with a Paint Bucket to change the base colours accordingly.

> **"Colour can turn each panel from a two-dimensional drawing into a window to a rich, nuanced world"**



4 SETTING UP LAYERS

I've seen colourists use dozens of Photoshop layers on a page. I find it hard to keep track of so many (read: I think that's crazy), so I usually limit myself to three or four. This will generally consist of my flats, a duplicate of those flats to render on, and a layer with my lines on it. Clean and simple. I might have a layer or two for colour-holds (coloured line art) and/or glows and lighting effects, but that's generally it.

5 PAINTERLY LOOK VS HARD EDGES

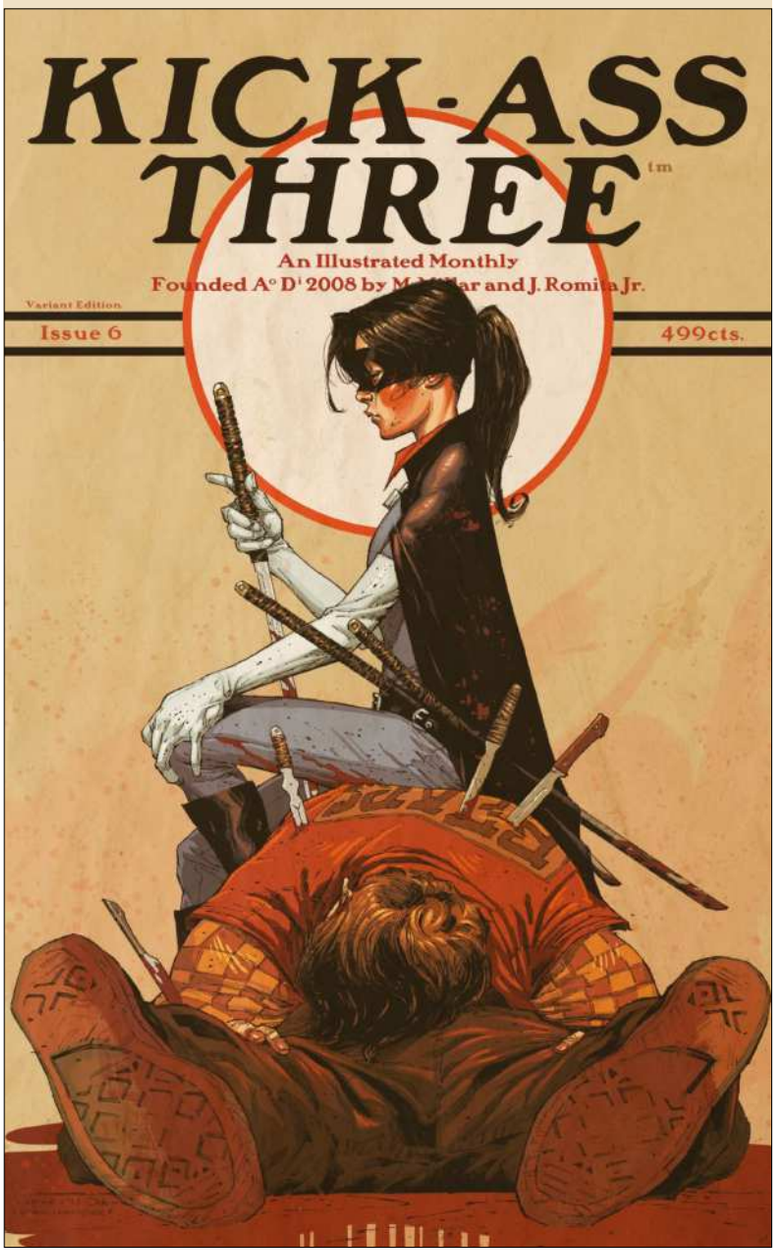
By using an aliased Lasso or the Pencil tool, I can render in a flat, "anime" colour style that's easy to edit with the Paint Bucket. Using an Airbrush or painterly brushes can be more artistically expressive, but makes changes more time consuming. Having the flats layer as a backup for each shape's selection makes that editing easier, however. Both styles have merits, and they can be combined. I'll often paint my backgrounds, and use flat shapes for characters. Or I might leave shadows flat and render into the highlight areas.





6 RENDERING TO SUIT THE STORY AND ART

A hyper-realistic, detailed style can add weight to a story via grit, texture, stubble and so on, while a simple style can let the reader mentally fill some blanks and speeds up the reading experience, without having to work through a glut of detail. Simpler can allow for more expressive hits of colour. I'm not trying to sell detail short here. Detail adds gravity and that counts for a lot. There are pros and cons to dropping out details, and I hum and haw over rendering options every time I start a new gig.



7 PERSONAL FLOURISH

A lot of colourists, veteran and newbie alike, worry that their colour should fade into the background to let the line art shine. I don't really subscribe to this school of thought. Collaborative art should be collaborative! I hope my work is recognisable regardless of the rendering style I use, through my colour choices and the sorts of shapes I use in my rendering. Collaborative art is like being in a band. Everyone needs to play to their strengths and show their personal style. Otherwise the art you make together becomes boring.



8 STORYTELLING WITH COLOUR AND SHAPE

Colour can be a great way to direct the reader’s eye via shadow lines, colour patterns and the like. While the main characters and action do their thing on the page, I can subtly reinforce the eye line and direct the action without clubbing people over the head with it. In the case of this page from LOW, I’ve used a triad of red shapes to quickly draw the eye to our heroes, despite the chaos of the rest of the image. ➳

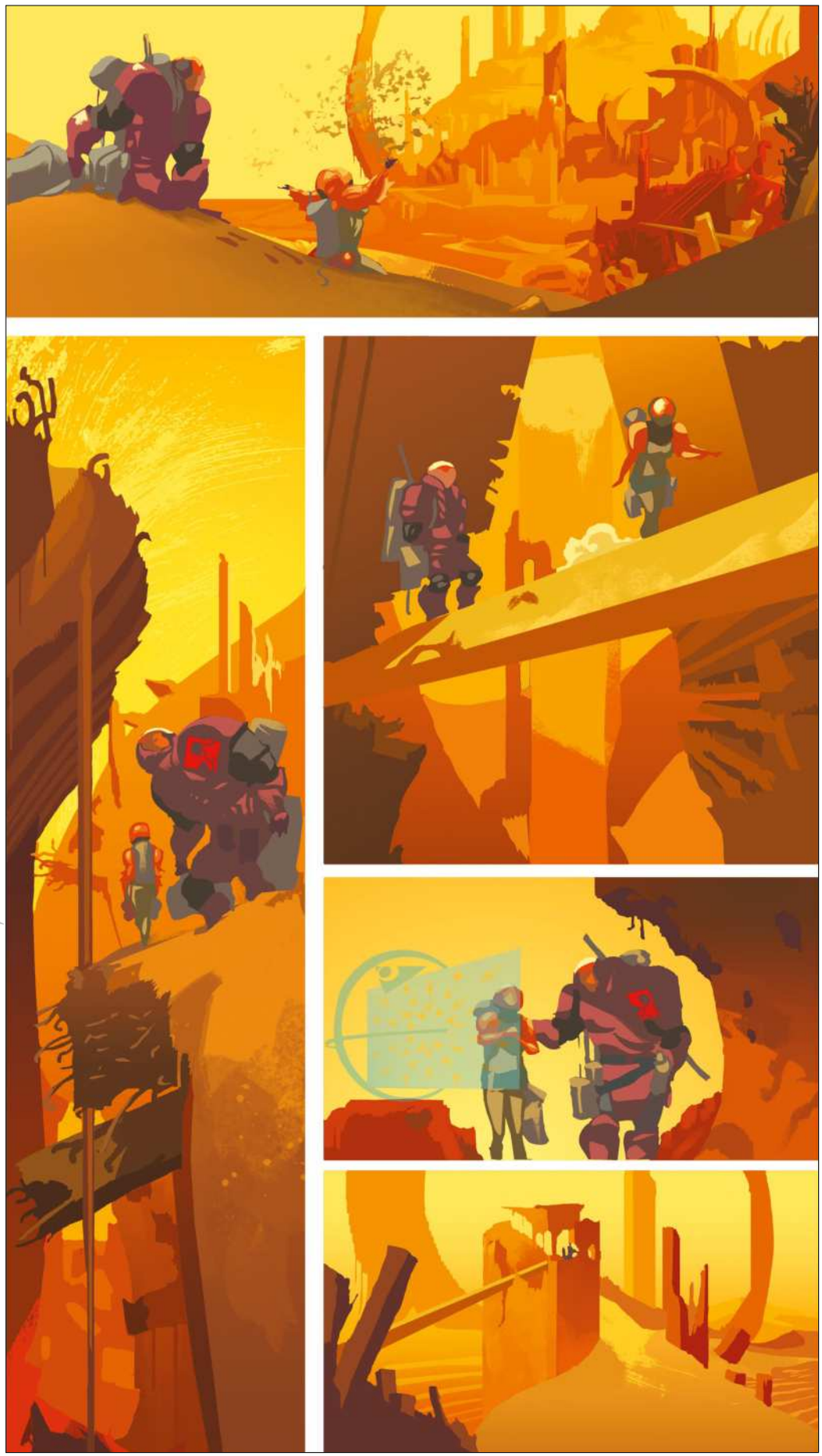


9 MOOD THROUGH COLOUR CHOICES

I try to use colour to help support the story. There are plenty of standards like blue or desaturated tones suggesting quiet or melancholy, while orange or green might hint at toxic chemicals in the air. A saturated red warns of imminent danger. Colour shorthand like this can be a great way to help the reader understand what's happening beyond and between the panels, and help separate scenes. If I'm working on a longer project, creating custom colour cues (and sticking to them) can be a great way to set that project's world-building apart from the pack as well.

10 USE VALUE TO CREATE PLANES AND SILHOUETTES

I often use desaturated, dark values for one plane, and saturated, light values for another. Popping things off those planes in a third value range with as much contrast as possible helps to focus the eye on the subject of the panel. These values don't necessarily have to be different hues. I often find that when people think about colour they focus too much on hue, and forget about value. As far as I'm concerned, value is the absolute, most important element in a colour, then it's saturation and hue.



11 RENDERING A PANEL STEP-BY-STEP

Shadow and highlights can make a big difference in how a panel is viewed...



A Making a visual connection

First I lay in the flat colours, while limiting my palette where I can. In this instance, what would normally be the whites of the eyes on the white-skinned woman match the green of her outfit. Her blue irises match her captive's too, which creates a visual bond.



B Storytelling through shadows

I tend to work from a flat shadow colour and render towards light. I drop a jagged shadow over the captive's eyes to emphasise her stress level. This also mirrors the face-curve on the white-skinned character, which helps show that they're in some sort of mind-meld.



C Use specular highlights selectively

Once I've blocked in all of my light sources with flat colour, I use a combination of brushwork and flat-filled Lasso selections to render towards specular highlights. I leave the highlights in the characters eyes higher contrast than their skin so that they retain primary focus. ➳



12 CHECKING YOUR PAGE IN GREYSCALE

Photoshop makes it easy to check my values. If I'm working on something with complicated, overlapping planes, I'll open a new window for it and change the proof setup to Grey. This enables me to work on the colour file while getting real-time feedback for my values in that second tab. For less-complex pages, I'll just use a hotkey to flip to Grey proof mode from the regular view occasionally to keep myself in check, making sure that bright reds among other colours aren't throwing things off value-wise.



13 KEEP COLOUR SIMPLE

I try to stick with value choices, and limit my colour palette to what's necessary to tell the story. Colour should have a reason for being there, and if something isn't key, it often helps the story to use values in some neutral colour instead of hues to help it sink into the background. The simpler you keep your colour, the more impact a change in colour will have, helping the reader understand that something important's happening.



> "The simpler you keep your colour, the more impact a change in colour will have"



14 EXPAND THE CANVAS THROUGH COLOUR

You can imply a whole world off-panel with colour, which is one of my favourite parts of being a colourist. I tend to put a lot of thought into the environment that a story takes place in. What materials are things made of? How dusty are they? What's the sun's position in the sky? How many minutes, hours or seconds have elapsed since the last panel? Are any lights turned on off-panel? I ask myself questions like this all day long. It's not just about colouring what you can see on the page.

15 MUSICALITY THROUGH COLOUR BEATS

I take notes on a script before starting an issue – marking time of day, scene changes and emotional beats. Do this in advance if you don't have much artwork in and you need to get started anyway. That said, if time allows it can be useful to look at all your flat colours together for a book, to make sure that the "musicality" of that colour works. Building themes, carrying them across different scenes, maybe using pop colours to emphasise important story elements. You're taking the reader on a colourful journey, so make it enjoyable for them!

PHOTOSHOP & INK

A FRESH TAKE ON WONDER WOMAN

BILQUIS EVELY reveals the creative process behind the striking cover of *Wonder Woman #16* and why she wanted to add more realism

Artist PROFILE

Bilquis Evely
LOCATION: Brazil



Bilquis is an artist who's passionate about classic comic books and fantasy stories. Recently she has been working on the *Wonder Woman* series for DC Comics.
http://ifxm.ag/b-evely

When I start a new project, my first thoughts are usually, "What should this illustration look like, and what drawing style should I use?"

Usually, we have a basic idea for the covers based on the stories, but since this was my first cover for the new arc of the series, DC asked me to do a "kick-off" cover. It would need to show what aspects of the character appeal to me, which brings me to my point about the style.

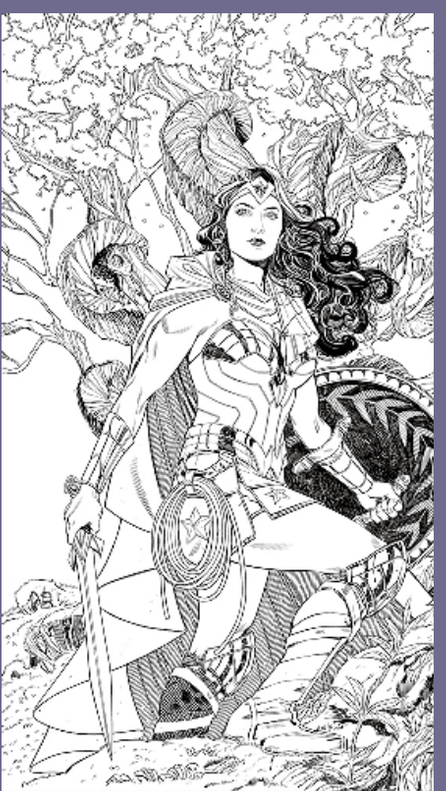
I love Wonder Woman – she has so many sides! She's a heroine, a warrior, there's a divinity quality to her, and yet she's very human, and this gives me several references to explore. So, my idea for the cover and for the entire book was to distil all those iconic aspects of the character into a single illustration, without making it a mess of influences.

My majors references were Hal Foster's Prince Valiant, Franco-Belgian comics books and artists such as Alex Toth and José Luis García-López, who are very good at drawing human bodies and casual scenes, because there's a focus on the humanity of all the characters in the Wonder Woman comics. It's heroic and it's fantasy, yes, but it's still grounded, which is why I avoid stylised, unnatural figure poses.

HOW I CREATE COVER ART THAT HINTS AT THE STORY







1 The thumbnail stage

The team picks one of my thumbnail ideas, and we add the tentacle in the tree to allude to the story. The scene looks beautiful and powerful, but there's also a sense of danger. I also add some colour ideas for our colourist, Romulo Farjardo Jr.

2 Digital pencils

I use Photoshop to do the pencilling, using Ray Frenden's Blue Pencil brush (you can buy it at **http://ifxm.ag/ray-pencil**). I prefer to work up all the elements in the scene during this stage, because it makes the following inking stage a lot easier.

3 Inking the image

Once the pencils are done, I print the image directly on to Bristol paper and finish it with ink and traditional brushes, transforming those rough lines into fine lines and textures. I want everything to be ready so Romulo can start his colouring.

© DC Comics



BATTLE READY

Behold the eyes

I always try to take extra care of a character's eyes, because at a swoop they tell the viewer everything they need to know about them. She is compassionate, hopeful, loyal and always alert. She's not looking at you, but rather something next to you. Be careful!



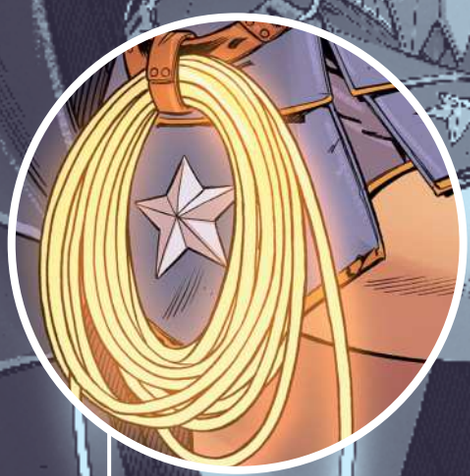
Composition

I like to use diagonals and centred points to develop the composition. I centre Wonder Woman's eyes in the top quarter of the page, mainly to make room for the title and create a symmetrical composition. I then place the tentacles in a circle around and behind her central body position.

Maintain a sense of strength

Wonder Woman is a symbol for women and sometimes this can be sidelined through the use of impossible anatomy, which female characters tend to suffer from. So I try my best to give her healthy, natural appearance, with an underlying sense of strength.





Arms and armour

I decide to draw Wonder Woman in full armour, primarily because I want to emphasise Diana's warrior upbringing, using the Greek sword and shield to indicate her fighting abilities. And also because, well, it's cool to see an armoured deity!



A well-grounded figure

I work on portraying Wonder Woman in a natural pose. Diana isn't a dainty princess – she's heavy and strong! Her foot position and folds in her leather reflect this.

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ARTIST INSIGHT

CREATE INTRIGUE IN YOUR WORK

ANN MAULINA draws and colours promotional art for her own webcomic, which contains a teaser for the tale that lies ahead...



Raruurien is my ongoing original webcomic. The story is about Rien, a recently widowed witch who lives with her two sons in a traditional mountain village.

Because of my decision to introduce a young, beautiful widow character, I get many questions from the comic's readers. Who was the husband? Is he handsome? How did he die? I try not to reveal any spoilers related to him. But sometimes I tease the readers by featuring him in flashback panels without showing his face. In this promo art, I'm drawing Rien's most beautiful memory of her late husband, which is their wedding scene. Again, I tease the reader by obscuring his face.

Artist **PROFILE**

Ann Maulina
LOCATION: Indonesia

Ann is a game and comic artist. She's the author of the award-winning webcomic, Raruurien. She loves exploring various ethnic cultures and lore to create a concept-rich story.
www.raruurien.com



PAINTING WEDDED BLISS

How I develop...
COLOURS THAT WARM UP THE COMPOSITION



1 Have fun with sketch designs
In this wedding scene I want to bring the most out of Rien's beautiful ethnic wedding dress. So I begin the process by producing a range of sketches that show off the design of her outfit.



2 Develop a colour composition
I pick a triad colour scheme and block the main objects with colours that determine the temperature of the scene. Adding more colours to the palette is key: it helps me visualise a rough version of the final image.



3 Adding detail to the colour sketch
Once I have the colour composition locked in place, the rest of the process is just detailing and finishing. I start by applying base colours, shading, reflected lights and highlights.

Framing the scene and guiding the eye
I use the flag arrangement in this image to guide the viewer's eyes. The lines and wind direction flow across the image, which prevent the viewer from exiting the image, and focuses their attention on one area: the title logo.

Create a painterly background
I adopt a painterly drawing style for the background, using a Soft square brush for the flags and a water ink brush for the cloud. By using solid colours on the characters and painterly colours on the background I create a depth of field effect. The further an object is from a figure, the more painterly it becomes.

Reflected light for different materials

There are three levels of reflected light in this image. A metallic surface generates hard reflected lights with strong colours. Silk creates soft-edged reflected light with strong colours. Blurry, soft reflections are generated by light hitting regular fabric.

The story behind the tribal designs

There's a bit of subtle storytelling going on here. A wedding is the joining of two families. So I create different tribal symbols that represent each family. The symmetrical, insect-like designs are from the bride's clan, while the solid triangle shapes are from the groom's family.



PHOTOSHOP, ILLUSTRATOR & MIXED MEDIA

GIVE TINTIN THE FABLES TREATMENT

NIMIT MALAVIA combines traditional and digital media as he develops an engaging *Tintin* cover, painting the familiar while finding his own voice

Artist PROFILE

Nimit Malavia

LOCATION: Canada



Nimit has produced art for several major comics publishers such as DC/Vertigo,Marvel and Dark Horse. His personal work has appeared in galleries in the US and Europe.

www.nimitmalavia.com

Developing artwork for a cover is rarely simple. You must maintain the fundamentals of a standalone image, such as a strong composition with an interesting palette. But the cover also has to engage the reader so that it's not only appealing to look at, but also brings them into the story. Having seen some of my covers for Vertigo's *Fables* series, the *ImagineFX* team suggested I take a swing at another established character: Tintin.

Working on famed properties such as this is exciting, but it brings a challenge of interpreting the figure in a way that enables me to paint an image that satisfies my creative needs while also remaining true to the character's original spirit.

This workshop will focus on showing the choices I make in conceptualising the piece. It will give you a full process breakdown of the technical aspects of creating this image: touching on the different stages of roughs and approval; working up the image with traditional media; building the colours and values using an excessive amount of layers in Photoshop; title design; plus some personal techniques I use to re-inject some mystery into the final art.

GET YOUR RESOURCES SEE PAGE 146



PRO SECRETS

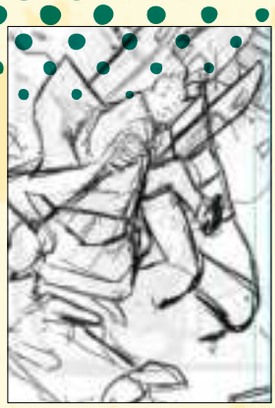
LEAVING ROOM FOR CHANGE

When building a consistent working process, it can be difficult to keep the results feeling fresh. Often, once the piece is nearing completion, I'll apply adjustment layers and effects, such as Curves, and experiment with dramatic changes on the graph to see how I can affect the image. I usually focus on shifting the hierarchy of the values.

1 NARROWING THE FIELD

For character-based projects, I often begin by researching their entire history, trying to find something to connect with. In the case of *Tintin* it was understanding that throughout his life he has been our gateway to unknown worlds and adventures. A perfect canvas. Once that ball was rolling, the ideas couldn't be stopped. In Photoshop, using a customised Round brush that emulates a ballpoint pen, I develop eight black-and-white thumbnails, each with its own unique story and setting. I can't decide which one to go for, so I send them all to the editor for a decision.


HERGE
THE ADVENTURES OF
TINTIN





2 DECISIONS OF DIRECTION

We narrow it down to two options: Mayan Cave and Airplane Escape. Either idea would've been a joy to execute, but as exciting as the rope-ladder escape would have been, it makes Tintin feel like an action star rather than someone who is being swept up in the adventure, as he is in the comics.




3 REVISING AND REFINING

I begin revising the line drawing, making decisions on the design of the characters, environment, placing the blacks and using different elements to help navigate the viewer's eye – the shape of the fire, for example. I try to be as economical as I can at this point, keeping the lines simple and not investing too much time in the details.

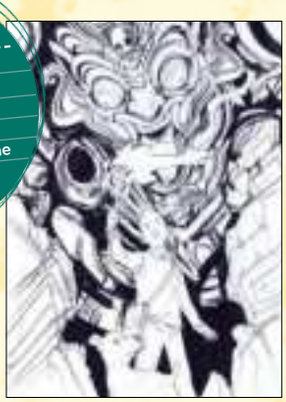
SHORTCUTS

Inverting the image

Cmd+I (Mac)

Ctrl+I (PC)

This helps me to see the Black and White balance.




4 PENCIL TO PAPER

From there I print out the image to be traced, using a lightbox and a 2H pencil, on to a 14x21-inch sheet of BFK Rives. Once the basic shapes are down, I switch to a Faber-Castell Schwarz Black and begin drawing proper. Along with articulating the details, I want to solidify my blacks.



5 LAYING DOWN FLATS

As my digital process becomes more and more involved, it's essential that I take the time to create aliased colour flats. They serve to help make quick selections on different elements of the image that I might want to isolate and treat individually, especially in a dense composition. Keeping them aliased also helps to ensure crisp selections.

WORKSHOP BRUSHES

PHOTOSHOP CUSTOM BRUSHES:

HIGHLIGHT HARDROUND 351

A simple Round brush, with Flow and Opacity settings, used for blunt work and highlights.

OIL PASTEL LARGE 8

A brush that offers a raw drawing line and texture for rendering and fills.

ROUND SKETCH BALLPOINT PEN 5

This is like the Round brush, with additional texture and frayed tips to give a traditional quality.




6 SETTING THE LIGHTING SCHEME

After laying down the colour flats I establish where my light source will be, and how the shadows will play on the figures and elements. I develop these with numerous Multiply layers, using an adjusted oil pastel brush, building the shadows of the piece in a very gradual way.




7 PAINTING IN VALUES

While the image is currently poorly detailed, I'm careful not to overpolish it. One usual pitfall is to render the same level of detail throughout the image. Despite all the articulation, it can feel static in the end. So I concentrate on more expressive painting techniques for the focal points, and limit the rendering in the secondary areas.





8 BRINGING IN ANALOG ELEMENTS

Usually by this stage of the process I start to worry about that dreaded static feeling coming in. So I begin reintroducing textures over the top of different layers to vary the look or enhance the inherent grit of the paper. In this case, I place two textures from a grunge set with reduced Opacity over the top of the sculpture layers.





9 WARMTH IN THE COOL AREAS

I need to bring some warmth and glow to the sculpture in the background. Using a gradient map adjustment layer and careful layer masking, I begin painting out the glow from the flames on the affected stones behind Tintin. I go in over the top of a Normal layer to add some specular highlights to the sculpture.



10 ATTEMPTING TO SPARK AN IDEA

Dissatisfied with how plain the colour palette has turned out, I try introducing more destructive adjustments to the image, trying to spark an idea or any kind of change, using Selective Color, Channel Mixer, Curves and so on. It does away with much of the work I've already done, but I find that Gradient Map offers the change I'm looking for.



11 LIGHTING A FIRE

Once I've finessed the colour choices from the original Gradient Map – the main goal being to find a complementary palette that unifies the image and keeps the warmth intact, using the flat selections in the layer mask – I begin dividing up the composition. This way I can reduce the effect of the Gradient Map on elements, such as the fire.

SHORTCUTS

Stepping back

Cmd+0 (Mac)

Ctrl+0 (PC)

In Photoshop, it's the equivalent of stepping back from the easel.



12 BRINGING HARMONY BACK

At this final stage, I look for any adjustments that bring balance and flow back to the composition as a whole. I decide that the foreground elements need to be further separated, so I go back into the midtones and I repaint the shadows of the layers to bring the cooler eggplant tones in. I then apply a texture Overlay layer with a low Opacity.



13 ADDING THE TITLE CARD

Customising and incorporating the title design into the image is one of the perks of the job I've luxuriated in most with my covers. It's a nice way to cleanly and cohesively wrap everything up. Since my execution is such a departure from Hergé's original creation, I decide that a simple traditional title treatment in Illustrator will be best. END

PRO SECRETS

LIMITING YOUR COLOUR PALETTE

If you've started a drawing and find yourself uncertain how to proceed, building your values up in greyscale then applying limited colour using either an Overlay layer or Gradient Map adjustment layer can help to find a mood and focus for your piece. Experimenting with complementary warm and cool tones can be helpful, too.

ARTIST INSIGHT

PAINT A DECAYING COMIC LANDSCAPE

For the first issue of BOOM! Studios' Coda, **MATÍAS BERGARA** was tasked with creating a wrap-around cover. Here's how he did it...

Artist **PROFILE**

Matías Bergara

LOCATION: Uruguay

Matías has been creating art for the comic industry since 2008, and his work has been published in Latin America, Europe and the US.

http://ifxm.ag/bergara



The image you see here is a wrap-around cover for the very first issue of Coda, a comic book series written by Simon 'Si' Spurrier, to be published by BOOM! Studios.

Because the story's an exciting, dark, witty and expansive new take on the fantasy genre, the main idea for the first cover was to provide a engaging introduction to the comic – a window into this new world, if you will. Much like the first scenes in a good film or comic book, it's important to establish the main elements and settings of the story. Yet I have to strike a balance between showing enough visuals to pique a viewer's interest, without giving away too much information about the story, characters and setting.

I chose to place the main character Hum and his pentacorn Nag near the centre of the composition, and filled the rest of the composition with decaying objects and creatures that survive in a world where magic once existed. My warm colours evokes the dawn of a new adventure, while atmospheric perspective hints at mysterious lands in the distance, waiting to be explored… ➳

TM & © 2018 Simon Spurrier and Matías Bergara



How I created...

A BROKEN WORLD



1 Laying out the image

My aim is to develop a strong composition, by effectively arranging the important elements of the scene. I start with very rough shapes, then proceed to define smaller objects and details while bearing in mind the larger compositional groups. I also explore colour in this early phase, following the same principle.



2 Inking the drawing

I work this part of the job in paper and ink. Two sheets of standard comic book paper were used because it's a double cover. Pen nibs and brushes enable me to turn pencil into inked lines. Varying the thickness and weight of lines will help develop the sense of distance in the scene, and a hierarchy of elements.



3 Colouring the composition

Once the art is scanned, I add colours in Photoshop on separate layers (many dozens in this case) that meet the image's many requirements: tonal variation, object separation, level correction... you name it! It's crucial that I produce a strong and clear image which is visually interesting, and not confusing.

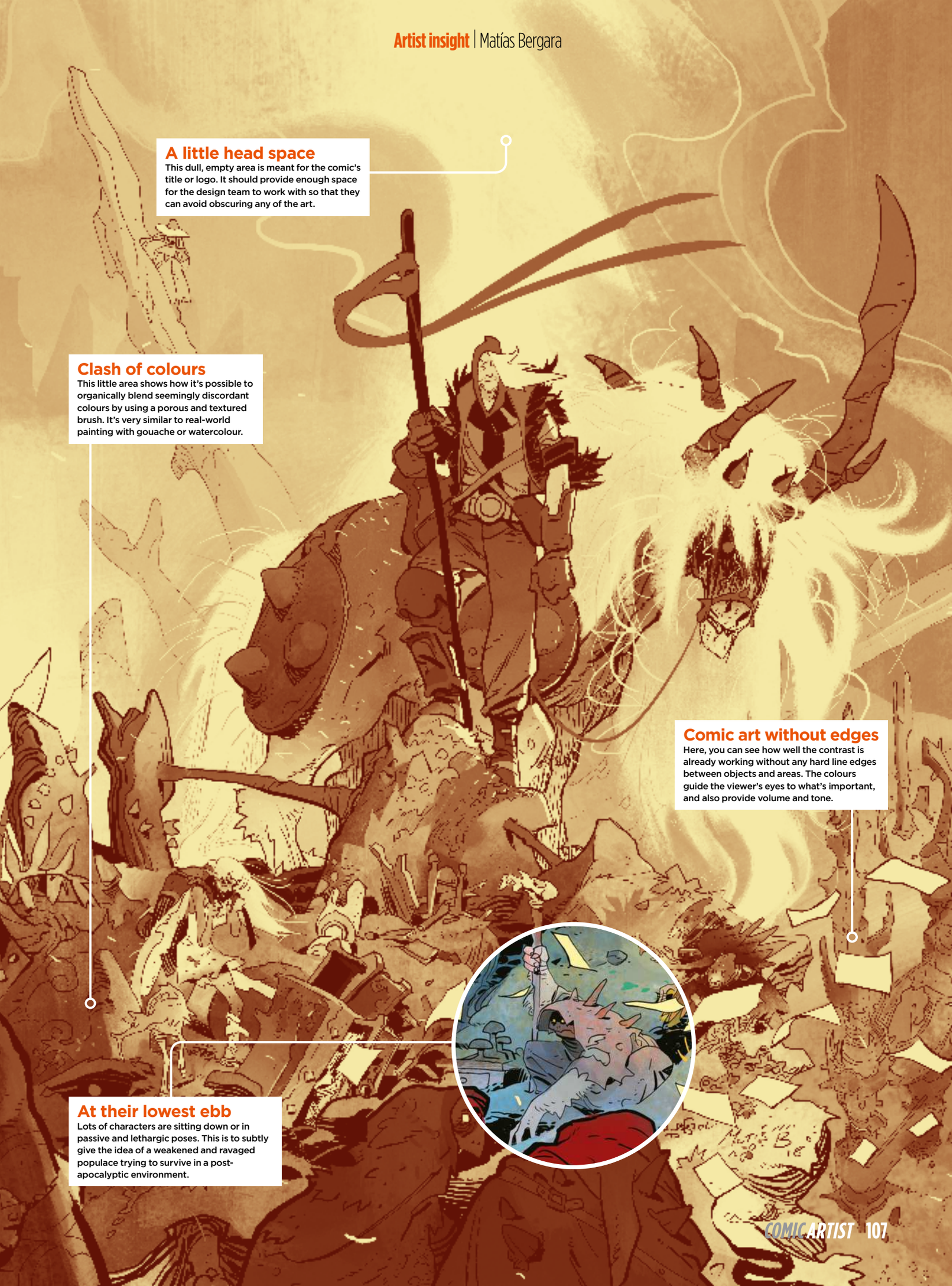
TM & © 2018 Simon Spurrier and Matías Bergara

WHEN THE MAGIC ENDS...

Rocky setting
A huge monolithic structure adds to the mysterious geology of this faded world. It makes for an interesting backdrop to the scene.

Dwelling on a dragon
This is a ramshackle hut built on the remains of a long-dead dragon. It's important, but it doesn't necessarily have to be in the foreground. You don't need to overexplain these type of elements in an illustration. The reader will use their imagination to come up with a reason for its inclusion, and how this ties into the story of the comic.





A little head space

This dull, empty area is meant for the comic's title or logo. It should provide enough space for the design team to work with so that they can avoid obscuring any of the art.

Clash of colours

This little area shows how it's possible to organically blend seemingly discordant colours by using a porous and textured brush. It's very similar to real-world painting with gouache or watercolour.

Comic art without edges

Here, you can see how well the contrast is already working without any hard line edges between objects and areas. The colours guide the viewer's eyes to what's important, and also provide volume and tone.

At their lowest ebb

Lots of characters are sitting down or in passive and lethargic poses. This is to subtly give the idea of a weakened and ravaged populace trying to survive in a post-apocalyptic environment.



Photography by Tyler Q Tucker

GET YOUR RESOURCES SEE PAGE 146

PENCIL ACRYLICS INK PHOTOSHOP

INK AND COLOUR A COMIC COVER

CHRIS VISIONS shows how to compose an image in your sketchbook using value, pencilling and inking, then colouring with both traditional inks and Photoshop

For years I was intimidated by working digitally. Something about the plastic nib on a plastic surface felt too jarring to me. I love the sway of a brush on paper too much, the pop of the ink from a pen nib – there's a romance in traditional work that I can't separate myself from.

Today, Cintiq tablets and Kyle Webster brushes bridge this gap a little more for me, but I still love paper. So here I present you with a process that enables you to keep your traditional connection strong while utilising the power of digital.

I dance back and forth in the beginning, drawing my sketch in my sketchbook, scanning and changing my lines to blue, and then printing it out to give it more detail traditionally again. I encourage you to keep a sketchbook: this is the place where you can hone your skills, play with different paper types and drawing materials, and see how you can lay layers and washes.

Go crazy in your sketchbook and enjoy yourself. You're making art, an act that rewards innovation and the new. Not only do your skills come out in your final pieces, but the fun you have in a piece naturally shines through as well. Learn to enjoy your process, keep that level of excitement high and the skill will come.

Going back to my sketch, you may notice there's no strong mid-tone. This is because I was working a certain way with pen, had an idea in my head on how the lighting would work, and I was itching to start the piece. Be sure to use reference, and use a mid-grey or coloured marker to act as a mid-tone in the layout stage. Your Presto Pen will also be handy in this stage to mark your light areas as well. That foresight comes from a lot of drawing and a lot of observing.

So, after I've printed out the sketch, it's on to the inking, which I love. This is where you really mould your piece, much like a sculptor. I like to jump around, building up the whole piece, not just focusing one area. This keeps your piece balanced. Working with washes and strong values enables me to build my form, which you'll find guides you throughout your digital colouring and works towards your goal of creating a striking piece.

ARTIST INSIGHT

HOW TO SOLVE PROBLEMS EARLY ON

Make your thumbnail image as solid as possible, establishing use of dark, medium and light tones to create an interesting composition. Small problems here will only get bigger later, so fix them now.



Chris describes himself as an "art maker and ground shaker" working in the fields of illustration, comics and wherever the creative wind pushes. Find out more at www.chrisvisions.com.







1 LAYOUTS AND CONCEPTS

I play with shapes and values on paper to create an interesting composition. I stay loose – sometimes doing literal scribbles, moving my pen around and falling in love with the motion of the marks. Here's a rough one, which enables me to have fun in the inking stage. I like to play with three values: dark, medium and light. This helps to create depth and balance.

PHOTOSHOP TIP

ADJUST LEVELS

Use the black eyedropper in the Levels panel to quickly set the black point in your image.





2 SCAN AND TWEAK

Next I scan in my sketch at 600dpi and print it out larger to save time redrawing the image. First, I take it into Photoshop, scale it to size, and add a layer of Cyan, set to the Lighten or Screen layer blending mode. You'll see a lot of options in your Layers panel that you'll be able to play with in later steps.

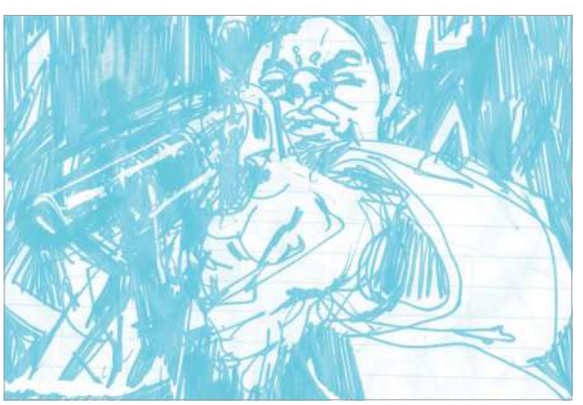
MATERIALS

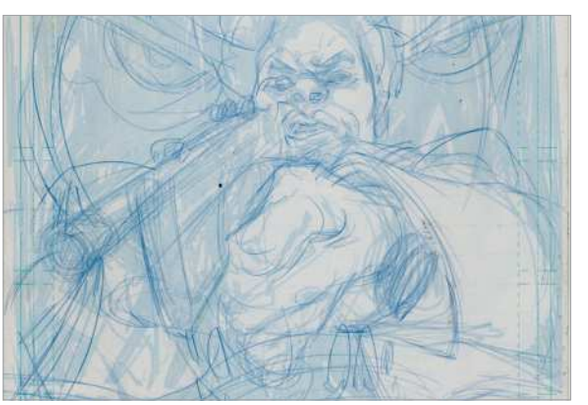
INK
- Sumi ink (black and Chinese red)
- FW Acrylic Artist's Ink (white)
- Homemade ink wash (roughly 10 per cent Sumi/90 per cent water mixture)

BRUSHES
- Sable fine point brush, #2
- Qval wash brush

PAPER
- Strathmore Blue Line comic boards or Bristol Paper, heavyweight

OTHER
- Presto white-out pens
- Clean water
- Col-Erase blue pencil
- Photoshop





3 PRINT YOUR BLUE SKETCH

I use Strathmore Comic Art Boards (100lbs/270gsm) but there are so many options with paper, and it's fun to explore. I mainly use this because of the guidelines, but with a large enough printer you can make your own. The only trouble is that the blue lines sometimes peek through and need an additional clean-up in the digital phase.

4 BLUE PENCIL TOUCH-UPS

Now I have a large physical copy of the sketch and can touch up any details. I've been able to retain the energy and looseness in my sketch by working smaller, but now it's about the details. Reference is highly recommended for beginners. Col-Erase Indigo Blue pencils are great: dark enough to see, but light enough not to stain the paper.



5 IT'S INKING TIME

This is my favourite part of the process. Here I like to jump around the piece, starting in areas that grab my interest first, going through and moulding my image. I love Sumi Ink, and keep Copic's Super Black in on the side to get those solid black areas. Some people can't stand the smell of Sumi, but I love it, like gasoline or liquorice. It comes in black and Chinese red, which enables you to create areas that can be easily selected in the computer. But more on that later...

ARTIST INSIGHT

KEEP YOUR BRUSH CLEAN

When transitioning from black to red/white, it's important to have a source of clean water so your colours stay bold and don't become muddy. This helps your values stay strong as well.





6 WASHES

My wash is a 40 to 60 per cent grey mixture in tone (0 per cent water, 100 per cent ink), a consistency that enables me to start relatively light, but I can add layers to achieve a darker grey. It's important to know how much water your paper can take, so test, test, test!

PHOTOSHOP TIP

HUE/SATURATION

Play with a colour and how it relates to others. A quick shift in colour can transform a piece.





7 KEEP YOUR VALUES STRONG

I constantly check my values, trying to not have too much grey and keeping a nice balance of black and white. Contrast is important. Squint at your image and if you can still make out your shapes, it's good. If it loses contrast and focus, punch up black and white areas. I use white-out pens and FW Acrylic ink to resurrect highlights and white areas.





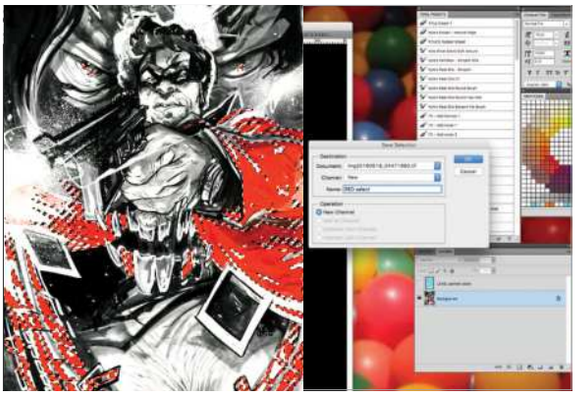


8 SCANNING IN THE ARTWORK

Now I scan in my inked image at 600dpi to capture all those details. I don't mess too much with the settings quite yet – I can do that in Photoshop, where you can fine-tune things a little more accurately. So I open the scan in Photoshop and duplicate the inked art layer. On the original art layer, I start by adjusting the levels (values) and contrast to my liking.

9 CREATE A TONE LAYER

On the duplicate layer I exaggerate the dark levels greatly, so the dark range overtakes the piece. I create a new layer, choose a base colour (cyan), and set the layer to Screen mode. Next I merge this layer with the darkened image beneath it, then set this to Multiply. So now I have a cyan layer on top of my inks, creating a cyan wash.



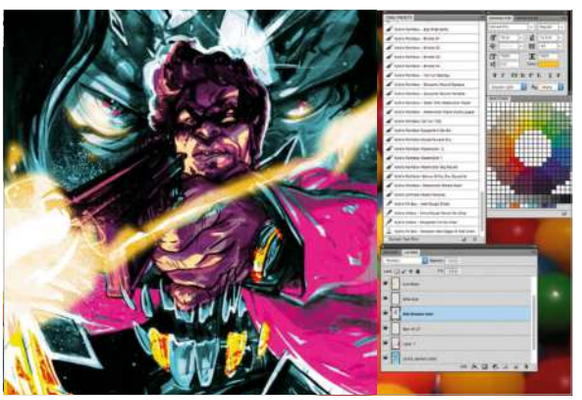
10 MAKE SELECTIONS

This is where the red ink comes in handy. I can select those areas using Select > Color Range – the stylus turns into an eyedropper, which makes selecting colour ranges easy. I save selections for later use using Select > Save Selection and name them to cut down on confusion later.



11 FLATTING AND LAYER ORDER

Now you can start filling in flat colours and playing with how your shapes lie on top of each other. In the comics industry this is know as flatting. I usually use cyan, magenta and yellow – they are bright and distinct enough that you can easily select them with the Magic Wand. Layer order also enables you to play with how your layers affect each other, depending on the blending mode you use and what's below it.



12 FINDING YOUR PALETTE

I like to have a set palette that reflects the mood of the piece, and sometimes I like to just find it. I start to shift Saturation, Lightness and Color using Ctrl+U. Colour is relative – your perception of a colour will change depending on its surroundings. So a lot of the action here is shift, react, shift, repeat. If you feel stuck, search the net for palettes.



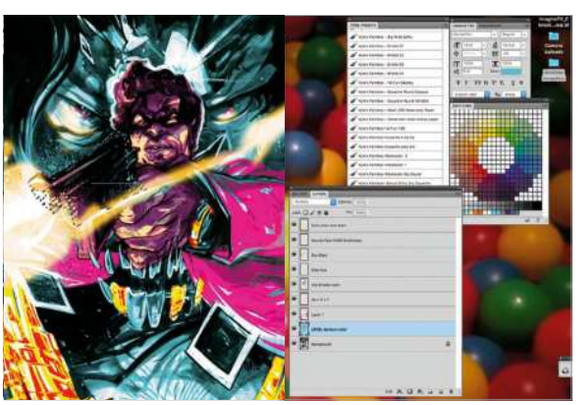
13 FINE-TUNE YOUR LIGHTING

Thankfully, with all the work I've done in the traditional stage, my values and lighting are set. But now, it's time to make them sing. I pop them out with Color and Layer options. I want the muzzle flare to be softer, so I select it and go to Filter > Blur > Gaussian Blur and adjust. To give it some texture, I go to Filter > Pixelate > Color Halftone.

ARTIST INSIGHT

EXPERIMENT AND ENJOY YOURSELF

My tools change often. This keeps my process exciting. Don't be afraid to pick up new and unfamiliar supplies and test out their boundaries. Have fun making your images – it will come through your piece. Keep a sketchbook handy as well, and go crazy.



14 FINAL TOUCHES

Now I save a layered file, and then save a flattened file. Having a layered file enables me to go back to make bigger edits, but if I think the image is pretty much good to go, then now I can flatten and edit the piece as a whole, playing with Color Balance. This makes the piece more cohesive and ready for print. END



PENCIL, INKS & PHOTOSHOP

BRING COLOUR TO BLACK PANTHER

KEN LASHLEY'S *Black Panther* is brought to life by **JUAN FERNANDEZ**, a pro colourist who passes on a decade's worth of comic industry advice

Artist PROFILE

Ken Lashley
LOCATION: Canada



Ken is an in-demand comic artist with more than 20 years' experience, who's created artwork for the likes of DC Comics, Marvel, Lucasfilm, Hasbro and Mattel.
http://ifxm.ag/ledkilla

Artist PROFILE

Juan Fernandez
LOCATION: US



Juan has been working as a comic book colourist for 10 years, providing colours for a variety of titles published by Marvel, DC Comics, Image Comics, IDW and Heavy Metal.
http://ifxm.ag/juan-f

All images © Marvel

SHORTCUTS
Smart Lasso tool
Alt (PC & Mac)
While using the Lasso, hold Alt to lift your pen without closing the selection. To resume lower the pen and release.

GET YOUR RESOURCES SEE PAGE 146

Black Panther was the first superhero I really identified with. I'm a huge fan of the character. Over the past few years I've had the chance to work on the comic and it's always a blast.

When showing the process of how a comic image is created there are always a few creators involved, usually a penciller , inker and colourist. I've been inking my own work for years now and I've become more comfortable as I move forward in my career. So I decide to treat this workshop like I do my day job, and ask my colourist to do his thing over my inks.

I start my work the same way I do all my digital work: I lay down some rough areas and just get rolling. I open the work up by not overdrawing, letting the colourist have room to create. Juan Fernandez does some amazing work, and finishes the piece with great style.

I begin this drawing by laying down my red pencil. I use red because the lead doesn't become waxy when I ink over it. I use a lot of smaller pens and build up the line weights. I don't do roughs usually – certainly not in this case.

After finishing the inks I create a "clean" version. I take the full-colour scan, turn the image to Black-and-White in Photoshop, then turn down each colour. I then go to the Levels function and increase the black and decrease the grey. Now it's saved and ready for the next phase. It's colour time. Over to you, Juan.





1 Take the line art

Ken passes over his detailed line art of Black Panther and gives me a breakdown of what's going on in the scene. He tells me the dark jungle is lit by a bright light source from behind, as the figure poses menacingly in the environment.

2 Use colour to separate details

Every piece I work on, I start out by separating as much of the details as possible. These colours are not necessarily the hues I would use to work on, but just very contrasting ones to help with the separation.





3 Adjust the flats

I then go on to adjust the flats to the hues I want to work with, preferably going for dark and desaturated colours. This approach enables me to render from dark to light for the majority of the process. It's important to keep this layer locked, to avoid making any unwanted changes that could affect selecting areas with the Magic Wand tool.



4 Lighting considerations

The order in which I work is a bit unorthodox. I start by roughly laying down a light source and noting how it would affect the main figure. In this case I thought it would be interesting to see some secondary lighting coming from behind and through the foliage, which would give us some interesting rim light.

PRO SECRETS

DON'T BE AFRAID TO EXPERIMENT

I often meet aspiring artists whose pieces are either too stiff or resemble another artist's style too much. In this digital era there's no excuse for not trying out different techniques. We're all inspired by the works of artists who came before us. Yet to establish an identity and a unique style, we can't just replicate what we've seen done. One must interpret that which inspires us and incorporate it into what we already know, building up a toolbox of techniques along the way. It's by experimenting and interpreting that you end up developing your own style.



5 Rays of light

I then like to tackle the main figure or focal point of the piece, and add elements to the background that may contribute to the overall rendering of the figure. For this piece I decide to introduce some light rays coming in through the trees. They help me achieve some depth and separation between the Panther and the background trees.



SHORTCUTS

Duplicate Hue/ Saturation

Cmd+Alt+U (Mac)

Ctrl+Alt+U (PC)

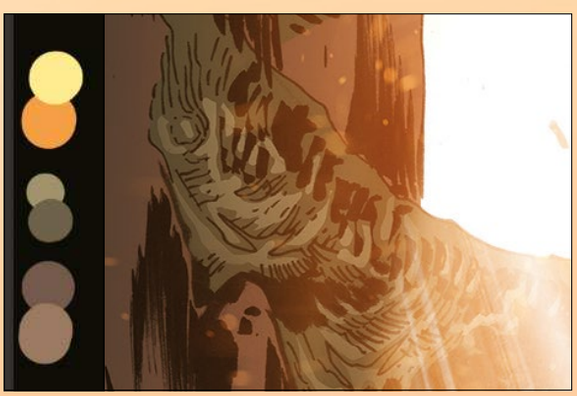
Apply the same tweaks to another layer or selected area.





6 Tweak the necklace and other adjustments

Once I'm happy with the rendering of the figure I go on to make a range of adjustments in the image. At this point I change the hue of the necklace from yellowish bone to silver accents, so that it stands out. The background starts to take shape, as I add details to the foliage. To avoid getting carried away with over-rendering and wasting precious time, I like to paint areas in, instead of rendering individual leaves.



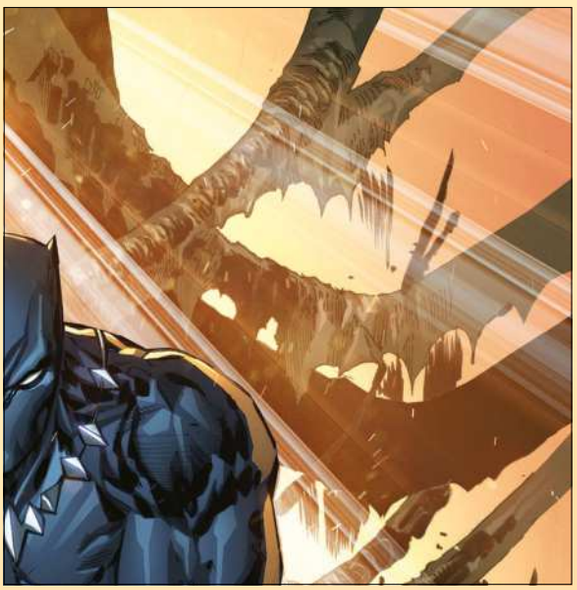
7 A faster workflow

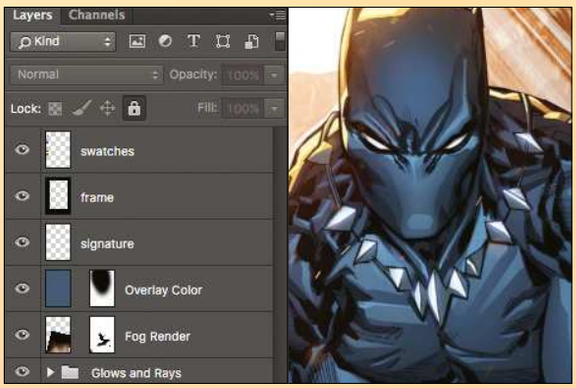
To help me keep my speed up I like to have a layer with all the swatches specific to the piece. This enables me to move faster while selecting hues to render with. Most of the time it's easy for me to recognise what every swatch is for. However, if a swatch is used for something minor then I tend to write a note next to it to remind me what it's for.



8 Adding atmosphere

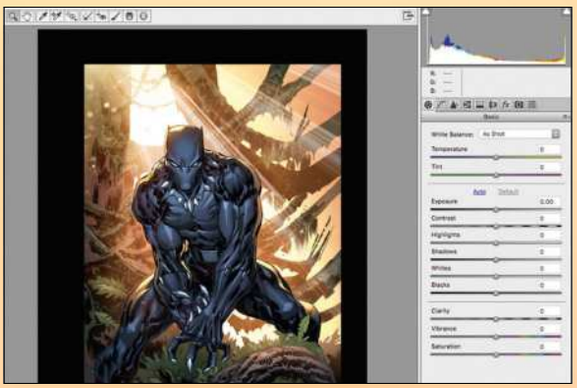
It's time to introduce some accents and effects. The strong light source coming from behind means we should see some particles in the air and some fog near the bottom, to help give the piece atmosphere. Using layer styles such as Multiply and Overlay, I add cooler tones to the bottom of the piece. These help guide the eye towards the focal point.





9 Thinking ahead

In the layer stack you'll notice that I keep all of my detailing in separate, transparent layers. This enables me to specifically adjust certain details as required after turning in the preliminary piece to the editor or client. In this industry, speed is essential, and most of these steps help me tackle revisions as fast as possible, without sacrificing quality.



10 Ensuring visual flow

Before calling the piece finished I like to take advantage of the controls in the Camera Raw filter. It's perfect to adjust Levels and the intensity of specific hues, pulling out details and setting back others. This way I can make sure the piece flows properly and the viewer's eyes are guided where needed.



11 A balanced piece of comic art

Hiding the line art helps me check that the piece is balanced and not overdone. This is the process I use in all of my comics work and, though some steps are specific to me, it's pretty standard for colourists in the industry. However, there isn't a right or wrong way to achieve what you want. I hope it helps you develop your own workflow. END



PRO SECRETS

THERE IS NO RIGHT OR WRONG

Yes, there are a lot of rules and guidelines about proportion and colour and so on. However, what makes a piece successful is its ability to tell a story, communicate an idea or generate a feeling. I'm often asked how I achieve certain things, but there are always other ways to get what you want. Don't worry about how another artist did something, but instead try new ways to communicate ideas. Loosen up and stay creative.

PRO SECRETS

MAINTAIN FOCUS AND BALANCE

Sometimes we get carried away trying to add the most intricate details to a piece and in the process lose the focal point. Then, when we pull back to look at the piece as a whole, we wonder why it doesn't seem to work. To avoid this, before I get started I like to determine where I want the viewer's eye to go. This identifies what's important inside the frame, so I don't waste time on details that might clutter the piece and affect the focus. One good exercise to help out with this is gestural drawing. Get down simple sketches using suggestions of detail, instead of trying to capture and render every little detail.

PHOTOSHOP

CREATE DYNAMIC CHARACTERS

ARTHUR MASK shows how to create characters with various body types tied together with coherent style and colour. Welcome to Arthur's world!

Artist PROFILE

Arthur Mask

COUNTRY: Brazil



Arthur learned to draw by himself and his first sketch was a mosquito, when he was just two years old. Nowadays he still draws, but now it's monsters and villains.

http://ifxm.ag/a-mask

Creating characters, scenes and stories has always been an immensely pleasurable experience. It's always a lot of fun for me and I never tire of it. My methods of creation are sometimes strange and disorganised when I'm dealing with personal works, and the illustrations almost always change during the course of the journey. This applies both to the characters, which often take on a life of their own and grow in directions I hadn't anticipated, and to the atmosphere and colour palette of the whole scene, which can change radically as I try out different hues for the ambient lighting. This in turn influences the colouring of every element in the image.

I create my art using Photoshop in a simple way without using many of the resources it has to offer, such as filters and effects. I use pretty much just a standard brush, always working with Pen Pressure, varying Opacity, along with different layer modes and the Eraser. I apply some texture brushes in certain parts just to produce an effect, but that's about it!

GET YOUR RESOURCES SEE PAGE 146

VIDEO AVAILABLE



1 Initial sketch

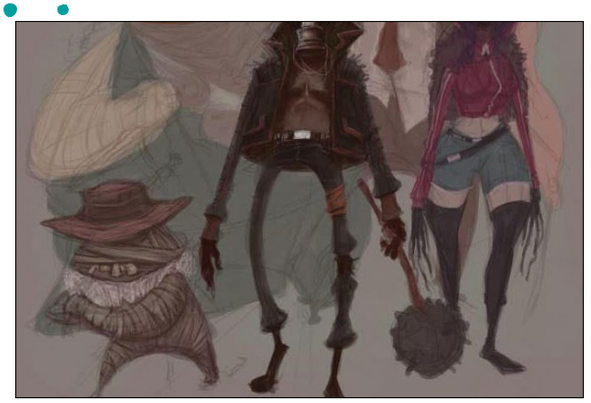
In my starting sketch I define the composition and the positions of the characters. I give each a different shape and personality, so the scene will be the most interesting possible and tell a story, directly or indirectly. In the process, I refine the characters. I keep in mind that everything I do at the start can be improved or totally changed by the end.



2 First element colours

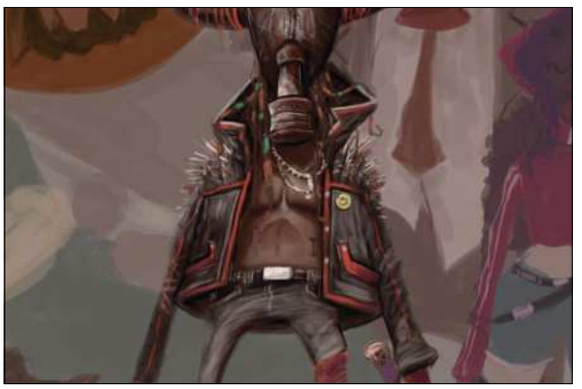
I start painting one element or character first so that I have a reference point for the rest of the characters and the scene as a whole. I think about whether the colour palette will be hot or cold and more saturated or less, and where the light source will be placed. I always start with a white, neutral light, then mentally make it colder or warmer.





3 General colour and harmony

I begin by roughing in the whole scene to test the colour scheme and the harmony between the characters. I always start with a medium colour and then the shadows and highlights. I begin with solid colours only and then add details and other shades of these colours. Then I step back to assess how harmonious and pleasing the scene is.



4 More details and depth

After this first colour test I begin to detail and better define a particular element, enhancing its colours. I keep checking that the scene continues to look harmonious as I add more highlights and shadows in order to give more depth and volume to the chosen element.

PRO SECRETS

BUILDING A UNIVERSE

Create characters that generate interest and conflict with each other and will create a good story. Think of each personality, creating appropriate clothing and so on – such details make all the difference.

Deconstruct stereotypes. Don't be predictable in your character creation: diversify shapes to build groups of characters with different personalities that complement each other. This will create an interesting composition.



5 Adding new textures

I carry on working character by character, bringing each personality out by adding defining detail and creating spotlights that establish the solidity of the figures. I next start to add new textures in the illustration such as fur, textile patterns and skin.



6 Redesigning elements

If a character doesn't come out the way I want, I redo a sketch over the initial element I want to change, providing new features. The illustration doesn't need to always follow a linear pattern of beginning, middle and end. I can always go a step back and rework it to reach a more balanced outcome.

WORKSHOP BRUSHES

PHOTOSHOP CUSTOM BRUSHES:



BRUSH ARTHUR MASK 01

I use this brush for just about everything. It's a standard Photoshop brush, altered for use with the Pen tool.



BRUSH ARTHUR MASK 02

I use this brush to generate texture in certain areas, implying that the element is organic in nature.



7 A more effective character

After my changes, my revised character (the one at the back of the group, wearing a shirt and tie) has become more compact. Previously, a hat gave him longish lines, but after the redesign he's more harmonious and charismatic; the Mickey Mouse ears fit in better with his companions. They also give him more personality.



8 Background colour

At this point, I choose the general background colour, which enables me to start to define the tone of the light that will affect all the colours of the characters and other elements. This provides an overall atmosphere, giving a dramatic look to the scene and establishing some sense of context for it.

9 Ambient light effect

I add the ambient atmosphere that will interact with the colours of the characters, placing them in the scene hierarchically and separating planes, adding distance between background and characters. I next add hints of the background colour to various elements, making the scene more convincing. Initially I test it on the central figure in the foreground and then apply it to the rest.

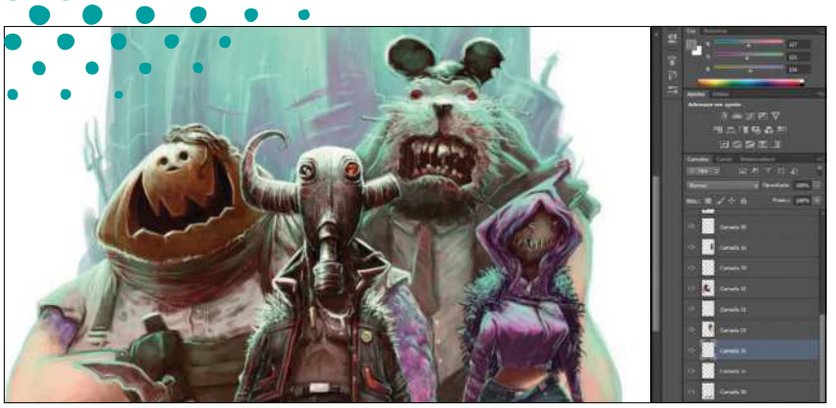
SHORTCUTS

Vary brush size

] or [when brush is selected (PC & Mac)

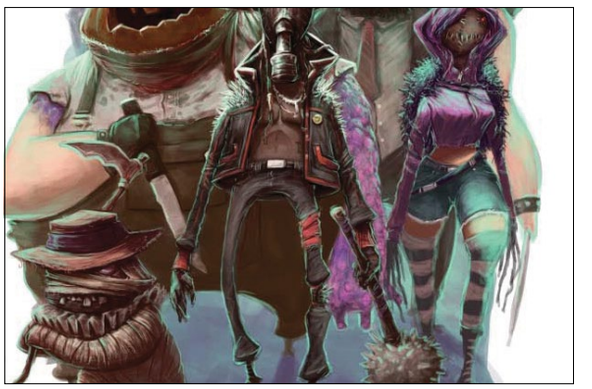
A quick and easy way to increase or decrease your brush size while painting.





10 More ambient light

Picking up the ambient light colour doesn't just tie things together – it can also be used to enhance contrast and sculpt the forms through careful placement of stronger or lighter tones of the ambient light on the characters. Then I refine the details in textures and materials and make the ambient light interact throughout.



11 Review and add more illustration

I don't necessarily follow a linear process during the creation of an illustration – it's something that keeps evolving. You need to develop a method that you feel comfortable working with and gives you the expected result no matter how many times you change things. Keep revising and improving until it looks the way you want.

SHORTCUTS

Zoom in and out

Cmd+ and Cmd– (Mac)

Ctrl+ and Ctrl– (PC)

Switch quickly between a close view of details and a handy overview of your canvas.



12 Angle of light

I also think of each job as a study piece, a way to improve and to ensure that I'm always evolving as an artist. I work on the contrast in the colours of the background and the shadows that affect the characters. I draw a light from above that falls on the characters, so that all the light comes from the same point.



PRO SECRETS

STUDY!

Always look around you, and look at how the light behaves. Study anatomy, but use reference only for studies and for stimulating your imagination. Don't be afraid to defy common sense. Don't be lazy – draw, get intimate with pencils, brush, tablet or whatever is needed and whatever you enjoy working with.



13 More details and corrections

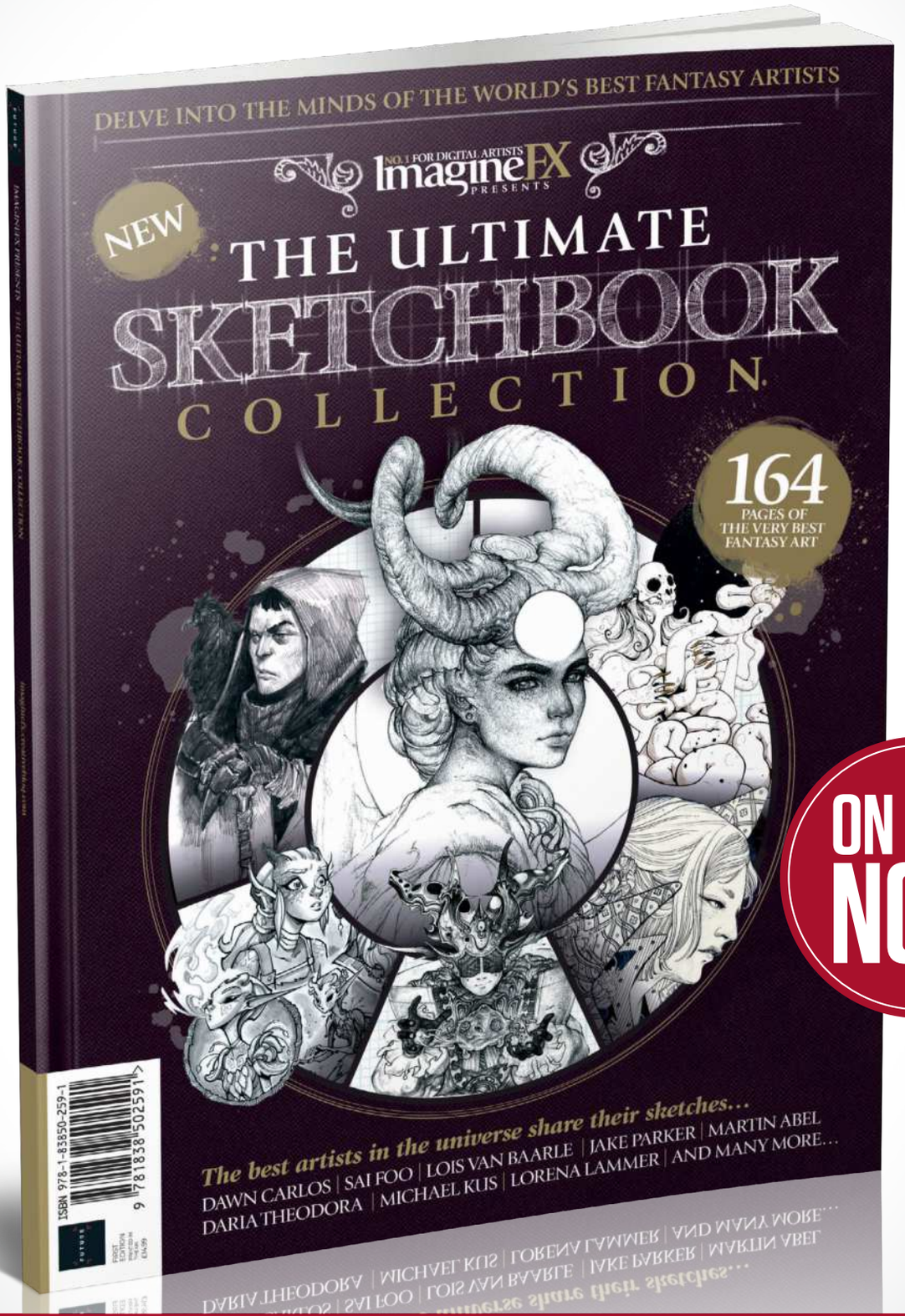
At this point, I refine the details on the clothes of the characters, adding buckles, belts, elements of pop culture, necklaces, scars, scratches and textures in shades of blood, tissue textures and details like the rat stole on the female character. I correct and refine the anatomy, fixing the leg on that character, and add details such as the knee pad.

14 Finishing touches

I add the final details, fixing some stray brush strokes. To refine the image as a whole, I add a more sketch-style finish in certain areas and draw some more scribbly lines on the background. As a finishing touch I add some personal style details, such as a crown and a halo, sometimes skulls, speech balloons with symbols, and the piece is done. END

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ARTIST INSIGHT

DRAW EXPRESSIVE FACIAL FEATURES

Comic artist **NEIL EDWARDS** takes you through the construction of a face and reveals how he's able to capture a character's emotions

Artist **PROFILE**

Neil Edwards

LOCATION: Wales

Neil is known for his work on Spider-Man, Dark Avengers, Fantastic Four and Herc for Marvel Comics; Justice League, Green Lanterns, Justice League United and Forever Evil: A.R.G.U.S. for DC Comics; and Dr Who and Assassins Creed for Titan Comics. **http://ifxm.ag/neil-ed**



Drawing heads with emotions and expressive faces is always difficult and challenging. Even now I struggle with the odd face. However, perseverance and hard work will get the expressive look you're after in your drawing.

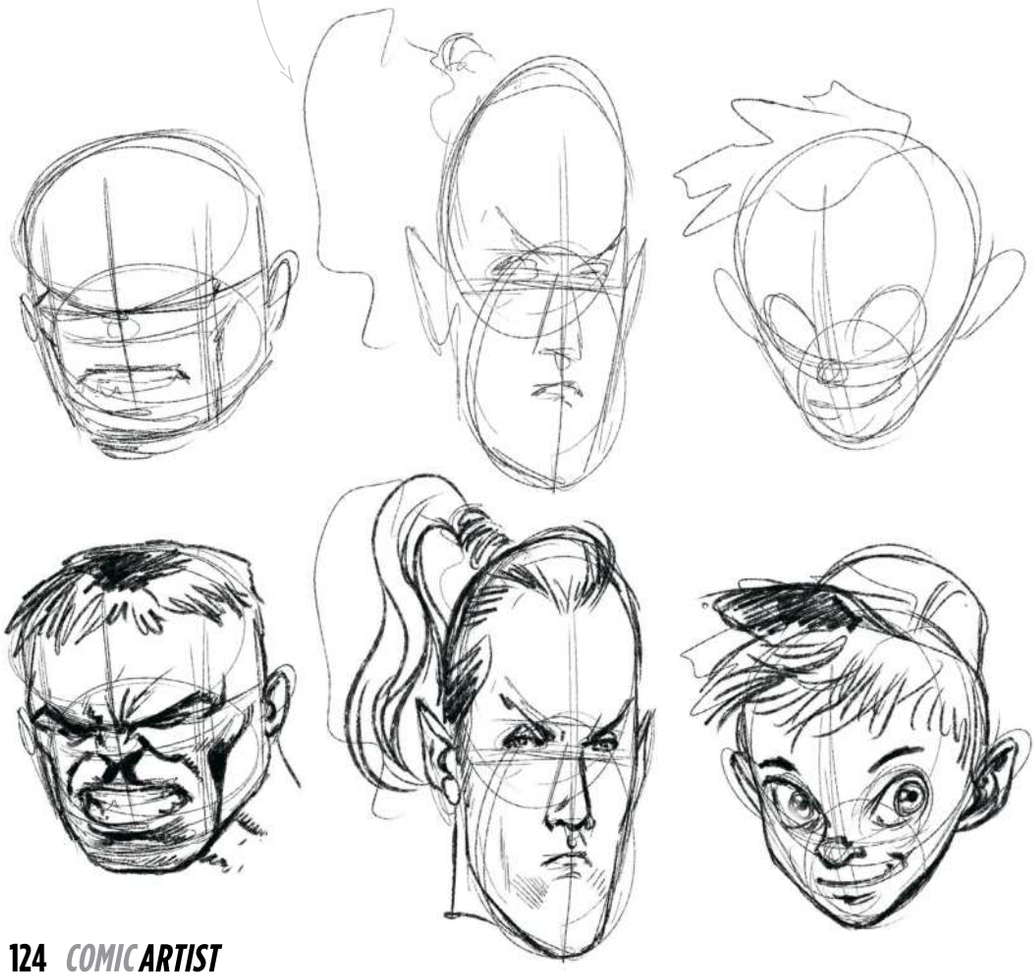
When it comes to drawing heads, nothing's set in stone because different characters have vastly different features. Yet a grounding in head anatomy will enable you to experiment confidently and it will certainly show in your drawing.

In this workshop I'll take you through how I go from initial drawings, using reference and my techniques when drawing heads. I use Clip Studio Paint, which I love, and I work on a Cintiq Companion for prelims and on the actual comic pages on a 27-inch Cintiq hooked up to a 21-inch iMac with 4GB of RAM.

Right, grab a sketch book or your Cintiq and let's get cracking!

1 CHARACTER HEAD VOLUME

Drawing two circles gives you a basis for the volume for the character you want to depict. The more squashed the circles, the wider and heavy the face, while the more elongated the circles, the longer head shape.



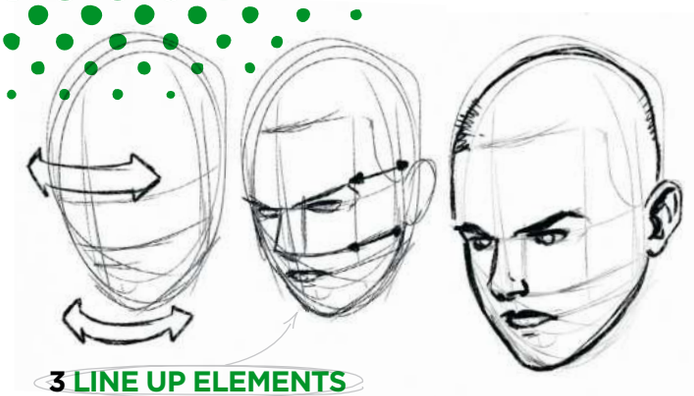


2 LIPS

I keep a little sketch book to practise different lip shapes for when the characters talk. Study films and TV programmes to see how actors exaggerate their mouths. Experiment and explore different mouth shapes. Try to convey "oh", "ah" and "esss": this will help when you want figures to look like they're having a conversation.



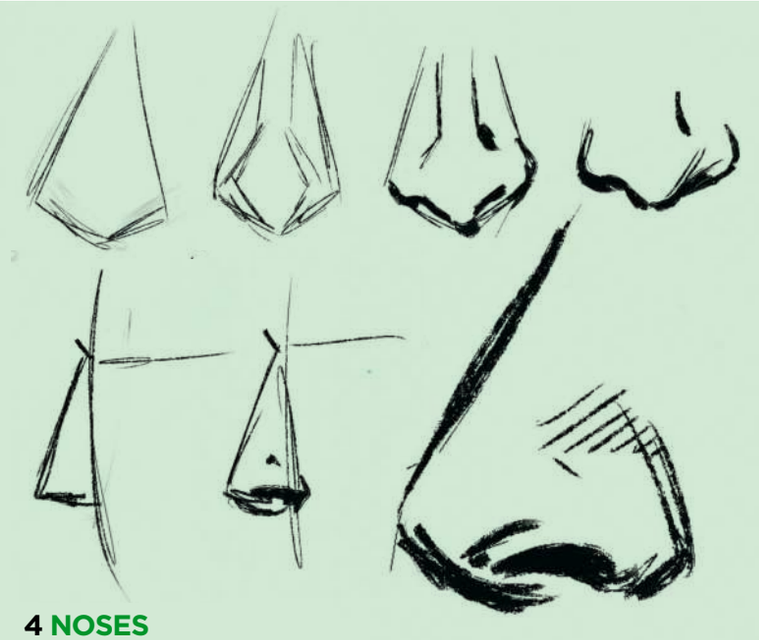
> A grounding in head anatomy will enable you to experiment with confidence



3 LINE UP ELEMENTS

Always remember that the eyes, nose and mouth are on the same plane on the face, otherwise things could go a bit lopsided and weird! Imagine that the facial features are warped around a cylinder so they have a natural curve. Align the top of the eyebrow and bottom of the nose so that they're lined up with the height of the ear. This helps the face look more natural; giving it a flow, and avoiding it feeling flat.

> **"Look in the mirror and attempt to overexaggerate your facial features. Try to put feeling into the drawing"**



4 NOSES

Noses can be pretty difficult to get right. I initially create a triangle with a diamond shape, which creates the tip of the nose. From there I draw nostrils, remembering to add line weight and shadow to the bottom of the nose. I keep the details light, adding only what's needed.



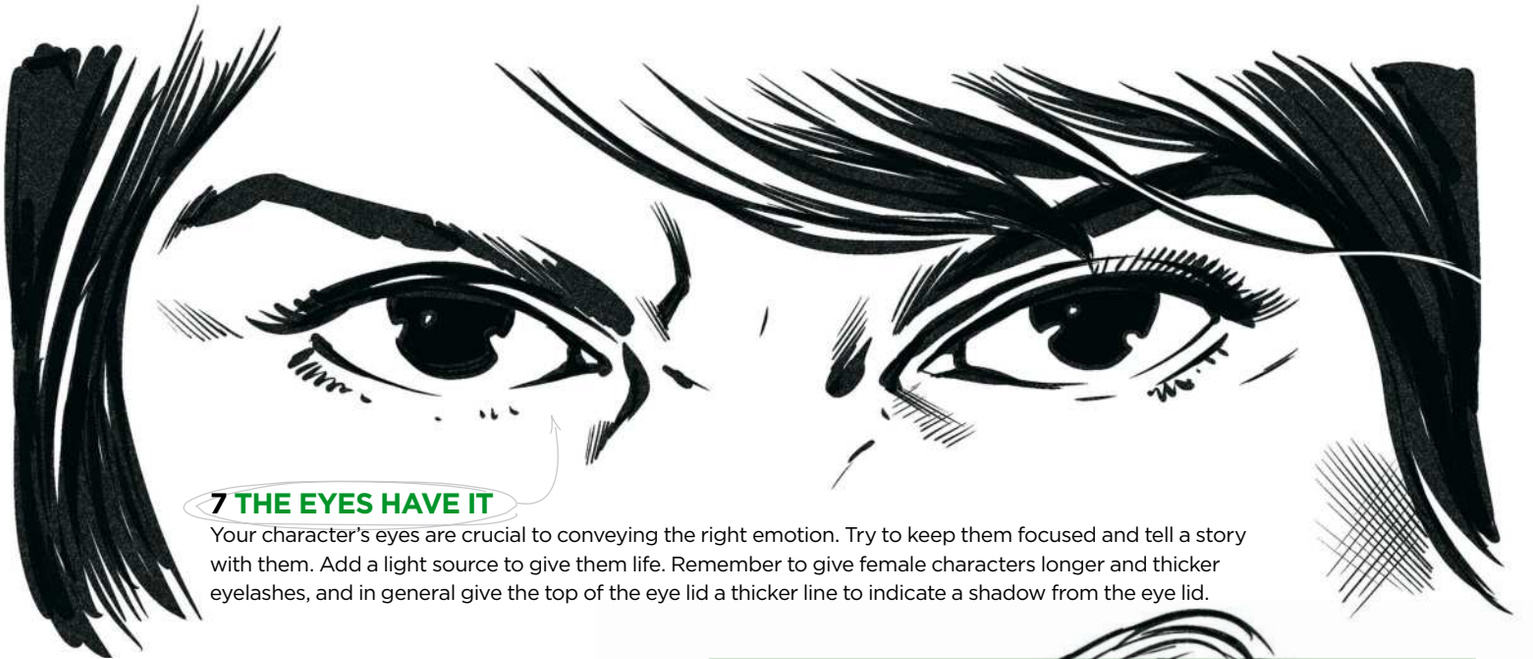
5 HAIR ADVICE

When drawing a character's hair I first create the basic hair shape, noting that the hair is bigger than the scalp. I then add direction to the hair, remembering to draw strokes from the crown of the head. To give hair a more natural appearance, I introduce a sense of weight to the bottom of the shape. Trying drawing the hair shape with a thicker outline and thinner internal lines. This gives it direction.



6 HAVING FUN

Once you've got the basics it's time to have some fun with your figures! As a general rule, try to make the character overact, to really convey the emotion in your drawing. I usually start with a super-quick gesture drawing to capture the emotion I'm after. Look in the mirror and try to overexaggerate your facial features. Try to put feeling into the drawing.



7 THE EYES HAVE IT

Your character's eyes are crucial to conveying the right emotion. Try to keep them focused and tell a story with them. Add a light source to give them life. Remember to give female characters longer and thicker eyelashes, and in general give the top of the eye lid a thicker line to indicate a shadow from the eye lid.



8 ACTING CLASSES

When drawing characters, try to get into their mindset: how they're feeling and where they're coming from emotionally. Then act out the expression, using a mirror or photo reference to capture the emotion. Always try to get that perfect snap-shot moment, and make it look as dynamic as possible.



9 BEING SUBTLE

Sometimes, though, subtlety is required. A slightly raised eyebrow or smirk can be very effective. Adding just a touch of emotion or quirkiness to the character can make them feel natural and life-like.



10 DON'T BE SCARED

Grab every opportunity to experiment with the expressions. Try to push what you're used to drawing, and look at yourself in the mirror to see how the face can move. Try and be wacky with the different facial expressions, but be careful not to hold your breath for too long!

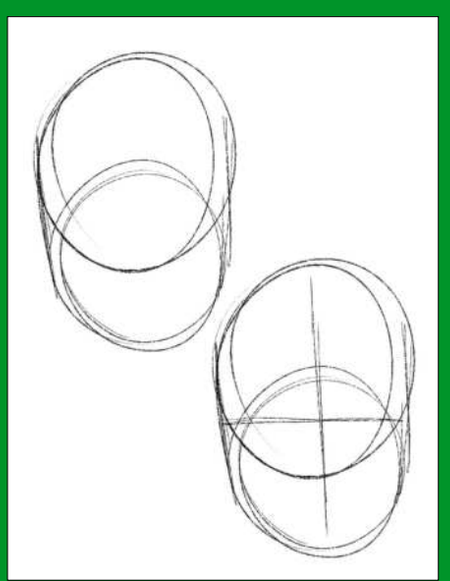


11 CHARACTER CLOSE-UPS

Both the eyes and mouth are expressive. A powerful technique when drawing a comic page is to use a close-up of one of them. Consider illustrating an open mouth, snarling teeth or stern lips. By using just one area of the face will really push you to convey the emotion and sell the drawing.

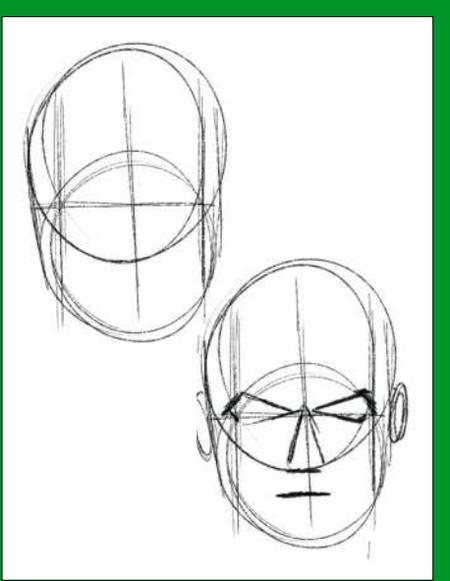
12 BASIC HEAD CONSTRUCTION

Neil reveals the basic concept he uses to construct a male and female head



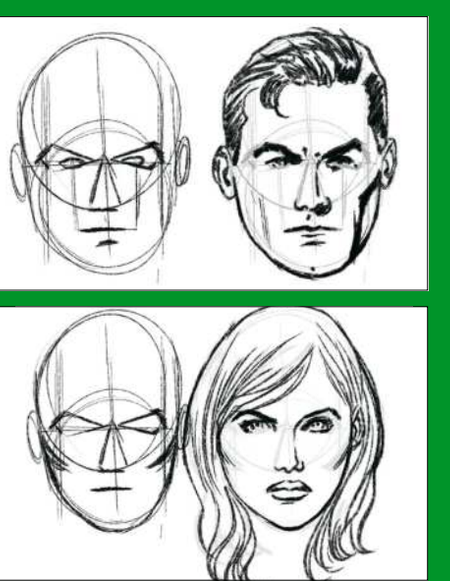
A Head basics

I start off by drawing two circles that are overlapping, You can experiment with different size circles to give different dimensions. Where they intersect is the eye level and from there I put a centre line down the two circles. This gives the basis of the human head.



B Construction lines

I draw two lines slightly in from the side. This indicates the forehead and cheekbones. From the centre intersection I place a triangle for the nose and add where I want to put the mouth. I also add two triangles where the eyes are, which also locates the eyebrows and eye sockets.



C Male and female faces

Once the ears, eyes and mouth are in place, it's a case of refining the face. The male face is a harder, angular shape. The female face is softer and rounder in general. For women, try to depict fuller lips, larger eyes and rounder cheeks. These are not hard and fast rules, though – just a guide.



13 BODY LANGUAGE

While drawing heads you also have to think of the figure's body language, which will show in the close-up. A tilt of the head or shrug of the shoulders can emphasise an emotion. I draw beyond the panel to check that the body language is working and is anatomically correct. Remember to have fun and try out new things!



14 WRINKLES

Adding facial lines to characters can emphasise an expression, but it's important to bear in mind the age of the person. The more character lines and emotion lines you depict on a face, the older a character will look. Men usually have harsher lines and females have fewer. Younger characters will have also have fewer lines around the eyes, forehead and mouth. This is a good excuse to put together a reference library of faces young and old.



“Explore all forms of anger, whether it'd from a crazy villain or determined superhero”



15 ANGER

There's always a ton of angry characters in comics and it's the one emotion that you have to get right! So experiment with all forms of anger, whether it's from a crazy-eyed villain or determined superhero! Remember the eyebrows, too: they can be very effective – especially when using variations of eyebrows and eye shapes to convey the angry mood of the character.

ARTIST Q&A

GET YOUR RESOURCES SEE PAGE 146

VIDEO AVAILABLE

QUESTION

I want to draw someone getting pulled sharply in one direction. How should I achieve this?

Tina Wright, US

ANSWER

Dave replies



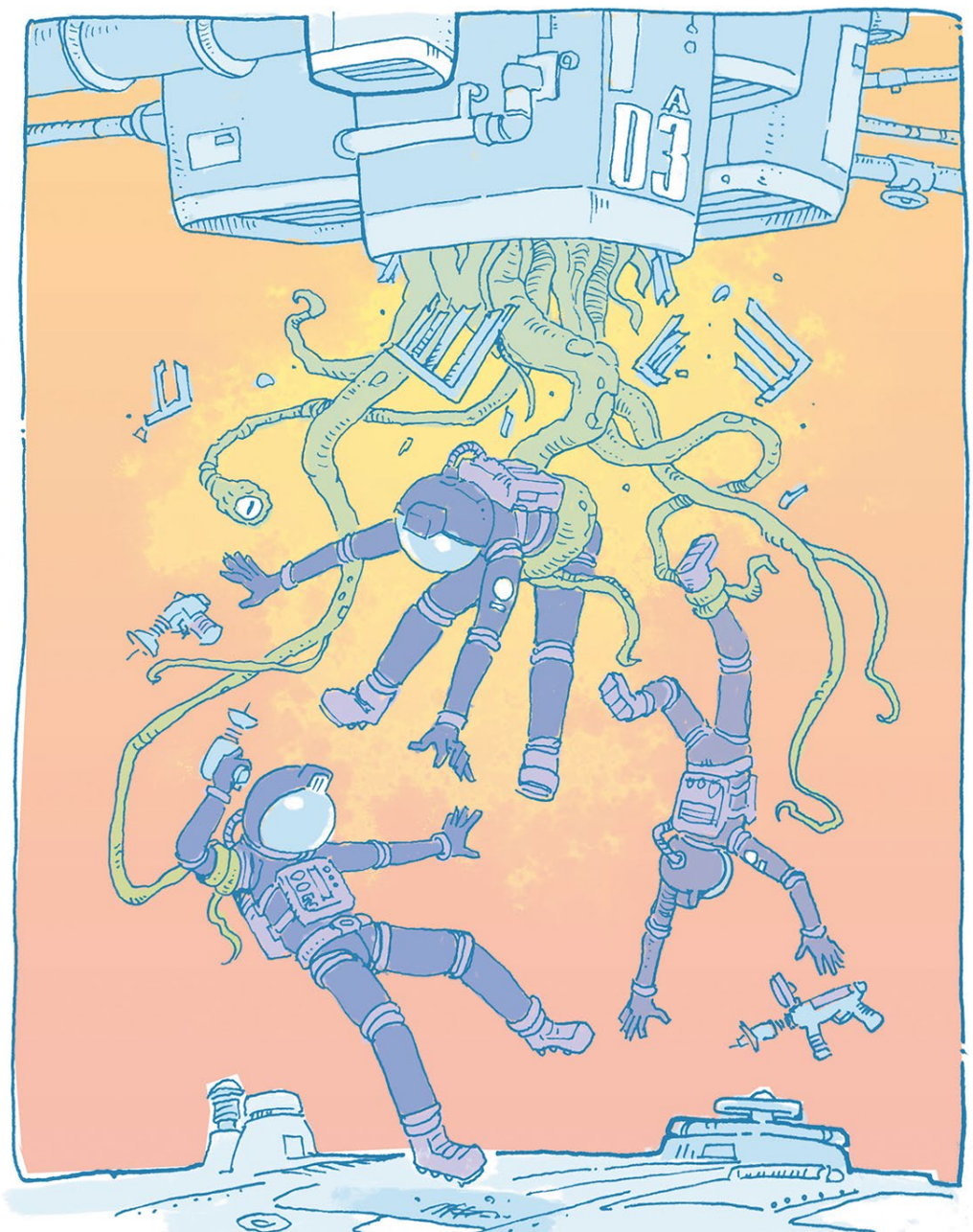
When yanking your character about in an action scene, consider the physics of the situation and how it affects the human body. Arms and legs will fly and flap about, and their positions can be used to highlight the motion you want to convey. When people stumble or fall, they'll often make frantic motions to try to correct their balance. Capturing some of that desperation will add that energy to your image.

Always watch those air ducts! These three spaceship crewmen risk their lives to demonstrate possible solutions for having a character pulled quickly in different directions

A recent spate of Alien franchise discussions inspire this whimsical space monster scene. I want to examine three varied poses, with each one being created by an external force pulling on the figure. I make these up out of my head, so they're a bit loose, but such as exercise is excellent for teaching yourself how to make this kind of pose convincing. Try sketching a lot of these, and don't worry – there's always more brave spacemen where these came from!



Bedridden at home with no Wacom or scanner access, I inked my drawings and captured them with the iPad's camera – a handy and quick solution

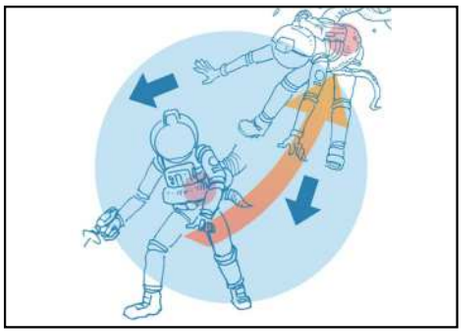


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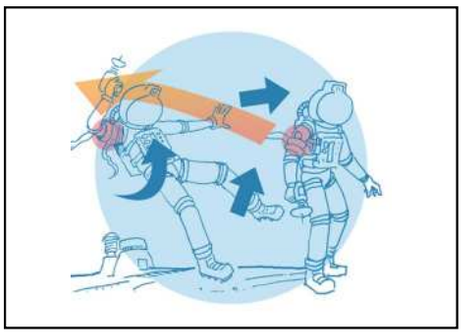
PROP 'EM UP!

I've used several props in this image. Having characters losing their grips on their prop weapons helps me convey the violence and direction of the motions. Create a visual trail of related objects behind your moving figure to push the action.

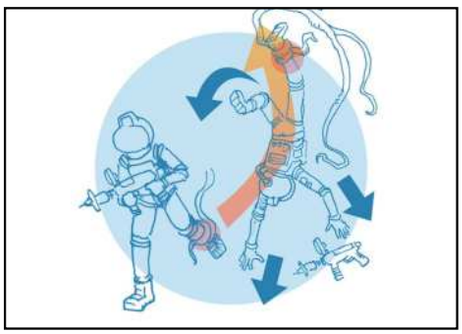
STEP-BY-STEP:
Jerk your characters around dramatically



1 This astronaut is being yanked straight up off the ground by a tentacle round his waist. He's bent double, and his legs are straight. His arms are hanging down and splayed out a bit, so that his arms and legs become "arrows" highlighting the direction in which he's being pulled. The lost weapon enhances the feeling of upward movement.



2 The alien's grip on this astronaut's upper arm is pulling him back. He's lost his balance, and throws the other arm outwards to try to regain it. The right forearm is jerked upwards, spoiling any controlled shot. The left leg scissors up as the figure falls back, and the head is tilted slightly forward in a bit of whiplash effect.



3 One poor chap is being hoisted upside down by the left ankle. The arms hang almost straight down (reaching for the ground can enhance the feel of the pose) and the right leg is folding down with gravity as well, causing the body to arc back. Again, a lost weapon emphasises the idea of being lifted sharply and suddenly.

QUESTION
I want to depict someone trapped in a bubble, but don't know where to start. Help!
Karl Henning, US



Since the surface of the bubble is mostly transparent, use highlights and reflections to create a feeling of depth

The thicker and more opaque the skin of the bubble is, the softer edges will be on anything inside



ANSWER
Tony replies



There are a lot of ways for a character to become captured in a story, but in most epic science fiction or fantasy sagas at least one person ends up in a bubble. It could be an indestructible diamond sphere, a rubbery balloon bouncing across the hills, or just a very resilient soap bubble. Every material has its own set of properties, although each version will most likely be at least clear. Whenever you're painting something that's transparent, the main idea is to focus on the highlights and outline.

If you think about your line of sight from a bird's eye view, you'll notice that it goes through the least amount of material when aimed directly through the centre of the bubble. Ergo, the sides will be more opaque as the sphere turns away from the viewer (creating an outline of sorts). Even if the character inside is bending their prison into something other than a sphere, just remember that the more perpendicular a surface is to the viewer, the less visible it will be.

I suggest putting the outline on one layer and then creating two separate layers for the front and back of the main surface. This enables you to manipulate their transparency. Place whoever or whatever is trapped on layers between those two and you'll have complete control over how opaque the bubble is. Then paint in the highlights, keeping in mind that the more shiny the surface is, the more hard-edged the reflections will be.

ARTIST'S SECRET

COLOUR COORDINATING



Avoid using hues that are complementary to a translucent surface's colour in any object that's behind it, because the resulting mix will be something more dull. Placing a bright green jacket behind red cellophane, for instance, will just make it look grey.

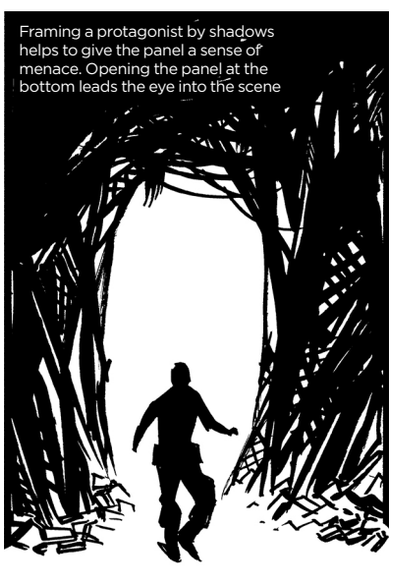
QUESTION
How do I imply menace through shadows?
Des Waterman, Canada

ANSWER
PJ replies



A common misconception with shadows is that they're all about lighting. They aren't. In art of every kind – particularly comics and fantasy art – shadows are a tool of storytelling, and the lighting in your image should be arranged to suit the narrative.

Making a person look menacing is about dehumanising that person so what's left is an idea, a hint of humanity (or even a suggestion of inhumanity). I start by drawing the head and then, following the planes of the face, I try to block in large shapes for shadow. Sometimes I'll try different configurations of shadows – if you're using Manga Studio this is easily achieved by creating new layers on top of the pencils to draw shadows over the image. Don't worry about details – it's all about trying to convey a mood rather than be faithfully accurate. However, it does help if you have a good basic understanding of the anatomy of the head.



Framing a protagonist by shadows helps to give the panel a sense of menace. Opening the panel at the bottom leads the eye into the scene

When I'm trying to convey menace in an environment, I'll work on a composition that enables the shadows to surround the character under threat. I usually block in large shadowed shapes, then on the edges I'll add specific details that suggest the kind of environment – brickwork for an alleyway, criss-crossed metal support structures for an industrial landscape, or the blinking lights of a computer room.

Once I'm happy with the pencils, I'll start inking. Using a brush I'll feather where the edges of the shadow are softer and require a subtle transition. In other areas I'll use a Hunt 107 dip pen to cross-hatch, depending on the material being rendered. Once I've outlined the shadow I'll use a brush to fill the remaining blacks. If they're not fully filled in, a viewer's eye may often see menacing shapes lurking in them, too!

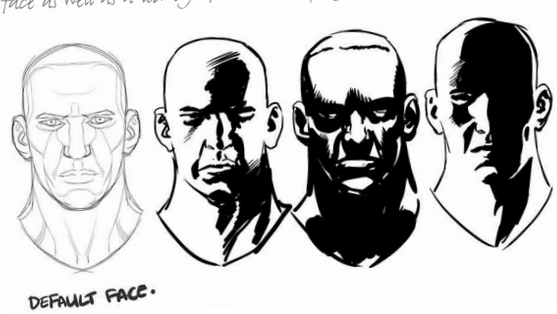


Lighting from the side introduces drama to a face, while keeping the background in silhouette will ensure that the setting remains threatening

ARTIST'S SECRET

THE SHADOW MORGUE

Build a shadow morgue – a resource file of images that use shadow to good effect. You can even create a face template to practise drawing shadows on. This will help build up your knowledge of the planes of the face as well as a library of shadow shapes you can use when you need.



QUESTION
I'm inspired to use insects in my sci-fi art. What's my next step?
Nigel Fellnar, Canada



VIDEO AVAILABLE

Consider adding elements to your scene that will display more aspects of the design, such as scale and any special features the vehicle may have

ANSWER
Tony replies



Whether it's the Reapers from Mass Effect, Invid from Robotech or the aptly-named Starbug from Red Dwarf, insects (and pretty much every type of animal with an exoskeleton) have been inspiring science fiction spaceships since the genre took off. The complex designs of Nature are deeper and more thoughtful than most of us could hope to create on our best day, so it's a good starting point for all kinds of stuff.

As with anything you create, the first thing you need to do is figure out what questions need to be asked. Whose spacecraft is this? Are they human-sized? What's the general demeanour of their race, and what sort of mission are they on? Or are they lost? Friendly or hostile? Is this their ship or did they steal it? The more of these kinds of questions you can answer, the more streamlined and focused your design will become. Just picking your favourite bits from a series of strange bugs can have an eccentric charm of its own, but only when you design with a strong narrative in mind will the message come across clearly.

QUESTION
How do I show a character's musculature underneath a superhero outfit?
Katie Phelps, England

ANSWER
PJ replies

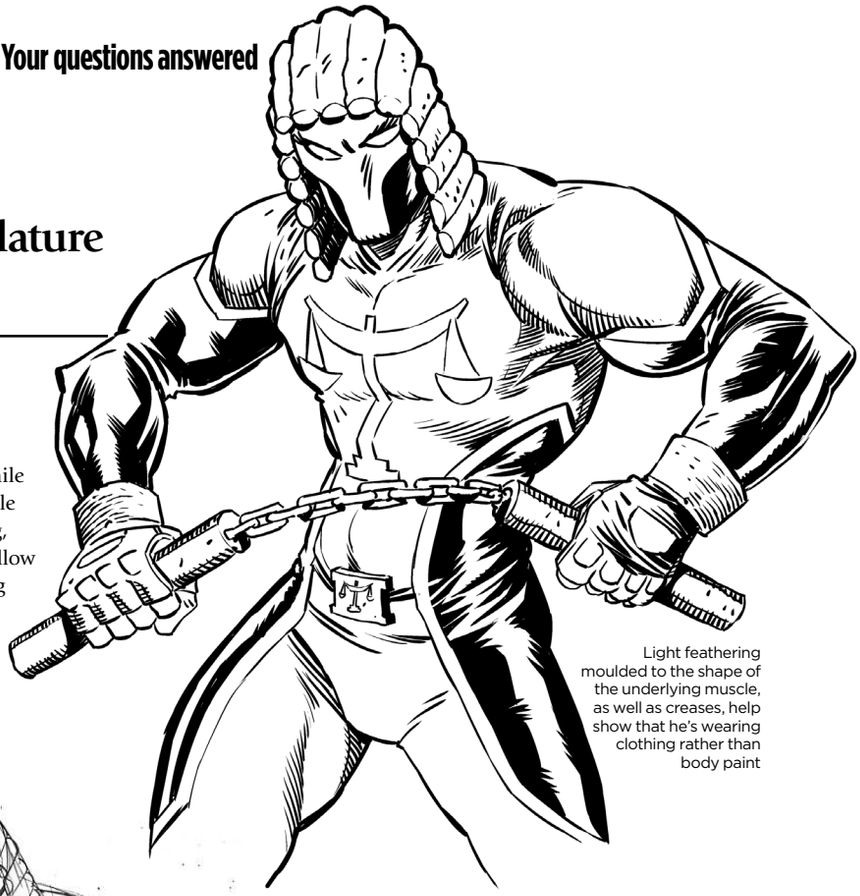


The simple solution to this question is to think of clothing as another layer of skin over the body. So the first step is to have a good understanding (okay, simple-ish) of the character's basic anatomy that you wish to convey.

In the case of our superhero The Judge, his physique is granite-like but not "cut". In other words, he's muscular but unless he's exerting himself in some manner, it's more relaxed muscle.

Once I've roughed out the figure that I want to draw, I begin to add the fabric around that. Often that means taking into account the kind of material the outfit is made from, as well as any design elements on the suit. While most superhero outfits don't tend to wrinkle, it can add a note of realism to an outfit. And as a simple rule, you'd expect to see wrinkles around the parts of the body that are compressed together. Of course, where wrinkles are compressing there's usually a corresponding stretching taking place opposite that compression, and how much wrinkling occurs depends on the kind of material.

Once I've established the outline of the material and where it's folded, I can begin the rendering process. Rendering depends largely on what the material and colour of the fabric is, as well as the environment the character finds themselves in. Leather material takes a lot of deep shadows and specular highlights, while fabric will have a lot of subtle feathering. When rendering, though, it's important to follow the curves of the underlying muscle structure, so even where contrasting fabrics meet there's a consistency on display.



Light feathering moulded to the shape of the underlying muscle, as well as creases, help show that he's wearing clothing rather than body paint



Even in this sketch, you can see that the outfit sits on top of the body rather than being vacuum sealed to it

ARTIST'S SECRET

EVERYTHING IS STORYTELLING

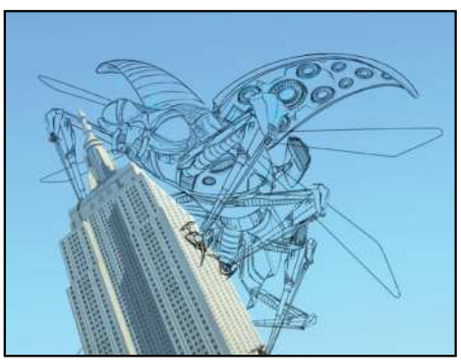


Rendering the fabric is a great opportunity to get in a lot of micro-storytelling. The folds can do the job of expressing movement and speed, and the shadows can carry a lot of dramatic weight. Don't let realism weigh down your decision-making process.

STEP-BY-STEP: From bug to buggy



1 Use the answers to your questions to create a theme for your design. In this case I want it to be an exploration ship, so my primary focus is mobility. The wings of a pine beetle, dragonfly tails and the segmentation of a beetle fly help give this vehicle a more all-terrain feeling.



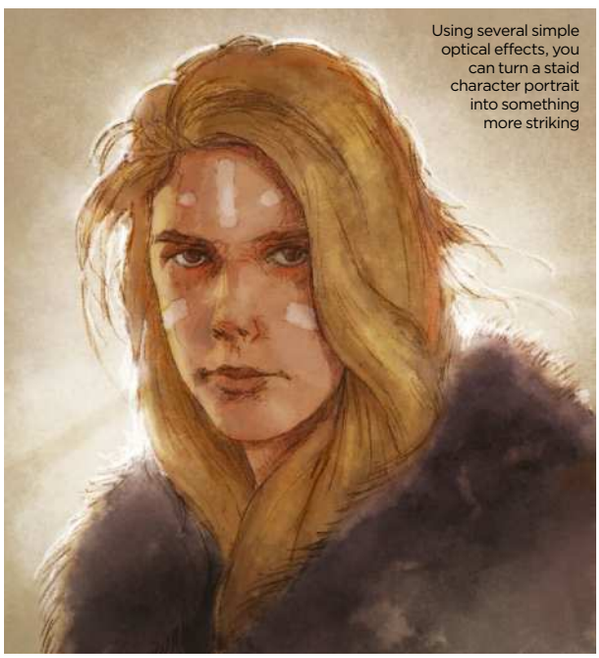
2 To avoid making a ship that could be mistaken for an actual insect, use your animal reference to lay out the initial shapes and then look to jet fighters, Mars rovers and other artificial craft as you flesh out the components, to introduce that unnatural, this-was-built-not-grown touch.



3 When figuring out the details, avoid making the entire ship too complex. If every square inch is exploding with information, the effect is like TV static, and it all just blends together. Conversely, if the whole ship is just one generic shape, there isn't much to entertain the viewer with.

QUESTION
How can I recreate the effect of an angelic backlight on a character?

Nicola Bradshaw, England



Using several simple optical effects, you can turn a staid character portrait into something more striking

ANSWER
Dave replies



Painting bright light can often be a challenge, but mastering a few simple techniques will make this much easier for you. A mistake I used to make was to push my bright light source as white as possible, but since we can't get whiter than white, where does one go from there? It's actually simpler to create the illusion of brightness by careful handling of the areas around the light source instead.

Direct light scatters, both in the atmosphere and in the human eye. Learn to simulate this corona effect in your art instead of blowing out the contrast in your light source, and you'll produce a much more satisfying result. If you combine this with careful edge lighting, you can produce a powerful visual effect.

Crepuscular rays, or sun rays, are perhaps the most obvious effect, but it's easy to overdo them. A soft touch with these can do the job very well without things growing out of control. In addition, a hint of bounce light from your foreground can contribute to the sense of a scene being bathed in light. Let's look at how adding each one of these effects drives the image closer to our desired result.



Here's my line art, scanned in and applied to toned paper. I'm going to change the drawing's impact

ARTIST'S SECRET

LAYER CAKE

For this kind of combined lighting effect, it's good practice to keep each effect on its own layer. You'll be able to dial each component up and down, and develop a sense of how much is too much.

STEP-BY-STEP: Creating angelic backlight



1 Here's my basic line drawing and colouring. I've scanned in my pencils and used digital watercolour brushes. The value range isn't yet all the way up to the white point: I want to have somewhere to dial things up to! I've also darkened around the edges of her hair, which is mostly where I'll be using the colour corona effect later on in my painting process.



2 I use a big grainy brush to spray in light behind the girl's head, and then on a separate layer, set to Overlay, I employ the same brush to dust light around the edges of her form. The end result is called colour corona, and gives a sense of brightness to the figure. I'm still not up to pure white yet, but already the feeling of the image has changed for the better.



3 This stage shows just the application of the edge light layer. Don't outline everything evenly, but instead think about where a light source behind the figure will break through most. I hit those areas with a bit of airbrushed glow. You can see that even this effect alone can be effective and dramatic. The edging can be pure white here if you want.



4 Here are all the effects combined, along with added crepuscular rays, but with the colour layers turned off. It's clear that this type of lighting can also work independently of colour, and can be applied to toned drawings or manga styles equally effectively. I'm always a bit wary of crepuscular rays, but with careful treatment they can work very well.

QUESTION
My reference-based drawings look stiff and boring. What's the solution?
Paul Limpar, Sweden



VIDEO AVAILABLE

The finished sketch has some value added in to separate the figure from the background. Even your brushwork becomes part of the design

ANSWER
Tony replies



Well, the short answer is to not actually copy your reference, but use it as a guide. I know this can be daunting when you're just starting out, but the key to creating a dynamic pose from a model or photo is being comfortable pushing, stretching and moving bits around to make the drawing say what you want.

Part of this is just something that will come with time as you build up figure drawing mileage, but knowing what to strive for is half the battle. For this example I want to really emphasise energy and motion, so I'm drawing the singer, dancer, actress, military spy and Legion of Honour recipient Josephine Baker.

The first sketch I've made – the left-hand one of the two drawings below left – is a direct copy of the reference photo. Though I'm still making a lot of design choices in regards to line weight and what I leave out (that's just sort of drawing in general), shape-wise I've made no attempt to stray from the source image. With this as a starting point, I'll show you how I push the pose to convey an idea. My goal is to use gesture, structure and technique to tell a bit of story with the drawing.



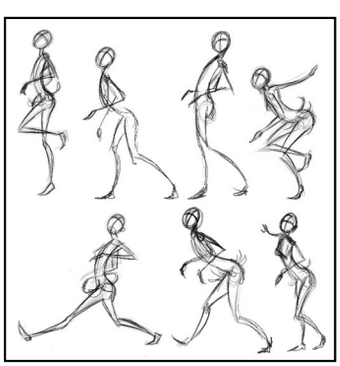
Hopefully the second drawing has a bit more gusto in it than the first, which copies the source directly

ARTIST'S SECRET

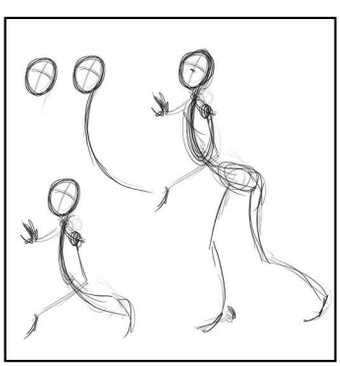
SHOOT MORE REFERENCE

If a gesture drawing really captures the mood you're going for but strays too much from the original reference, just shoot or find some more. You don't need to redraw the gesture, just use the new reference to fill in any spots where you don't feel comfortable improvising.

STEP-BY-STEP: Start small and loose



1 Decide how cartoony you want to get, what aspect of the model you want to communicate (personality trait, physical feature, particular motion and so on), then try to tell that story with the pose. In my case, there is an excitement to Josephine Baker's live performances (or videos of them, at least) that I don't see in most posed photos. Conveying that will be my goal.



2 Technique and varying line weight go a long way, but the foundation of a vibrant figure drawing is a descriptive gesture. Stay loose, experiment and have a clear centre line before adding in the limbs. Use fast, simple strokes to try out different ways of bending and stretching the body. Don't fuss with any single gesture, try out options until you find a pose that works for your theme.



3 Partly because it's better for a tutorial and mostly because it's my favourite, I'm going with the pose that strays furthest from the source material. I've used a lot of fluid, curved lines to get that bubbly mood, so it's important to now sketch in anatomy and make sure everything is still working proportionally. When you bend and twist the body, it's vital to double-check your structure.



4 As with the gesture and structure, you can push the character of the drawing by using thematically appropriate line work. An angry bouncer, say, might be drawn with short, straight, hard strokes. A drunk man stooped over a bar could be drawn with wavy, slightly disconnected lines. For this piece I'm focusing on smooth, jazzy curves that reinforce the happy mood I'm going for.



Take your original sketch and do several colour comps to see which palette fits the mood. Don't limit yourself!

ARTIST'S SECRET

SWITCH COLOURS QUICKLY

When I'm having trouble selecting a colour palette I sometimes let the computer help me decide. There are several online apps to help you: color.adobe.com and colourlovers.com feature great web interface tools that enable you to construct a colour scheme on the fly.

QUESTION

Can a garish colour scheme make for a more effective illustration?

LaVerne Harleson, US

ANSWER

John replies



The key thing to consider, whatever palette you're using, is colour harmony. Do the colours play well together? Or are they all competing for the viewer's attention? Another important factor is what kind of mood are you trying to create for your audience?

What makes for an effective painting is how the parts come together. Colour, value, shape language, composition and rhythm all work together to craft a compelling image. If you're relying on a bombastic colour scheme to save your piece, you may have other issues that need to be addressed.

Here I paint over a greyscale drawing several times, because the light sources change in each image. My two favourite Photoshop colour tools for doing this are Color Balance and Levels adjustment layers. In a Levels adjustment, you can tweak the red, green, and blue channels individually. Gradient Overlay is also a wonderful adjustment layer to quickly assign one colour to light values and another colour to dark.

The problems with using bright, saturated colours usually arise when you overuse them. But it really depends on the painting and what you're trying to convey. If you can pull it off, a "garish" palette isn't garish at all.

QUESTION
I think my basic drawing is not too bad, but what can I do to work on my design skills?
Anders Merson, US



Don't stress about it, just have fun and create something you like. It may sound crazy, but the more fun you have, the more you'll learn

ANSWER
Tony replies



I recently read an anecdote about a pottery group that may or may not be true, but I think the message is. A pottery teacher split her students into two groups. One half would spend the entire semester designing their perfect pot, the other half would be graded on the number of finished pots they produced. Once the final lesson was over, a competition was held to choose the best results. Half the students turned in their extensively researched pot designs, while the other half chose their favourite from the many they had made over the semester. After voting was over, it turned out that most of the pieces chosen were from the side that had made lots of pots.

The message is that experience trumps research when you're learning a new skill. Assuming that's true, I think a good strategy for honing your designer's eye is to make lots of compositions – nothing too complicated, just something where you can experiment with two-dimensional shapes and explore what you like.

You may not know who Patrick Nagel is, but he painted the album cover for Rio by '80s-supergroup Duran Duran. I think that his style of flat colours, clean lines and simple shapes makes for a fun kind of student exercise. That, and it gives me a reason to draw the Nagel-style image of British TV celebrity Sue Perkins that this world so desperately needs. Fair warning, a Google search for Nagel's art may get a little saucy.

Below is a drawing where I'm using fewer elements. I suggest at least trying a few where your goal is to use as few shapes as possible



VIDEO AVAILABLE

ARTIST'S SECRET

THUMBS IN A FOLDER

With this exercise and pretty much all illustrations, I find it helps to keep all of my thumbnails in their own folder. Being able to scale and scroll through them is the easiest way for me to know which ones I prefer.

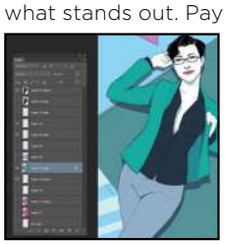
STEP-BY-STEP: Stay simple and experiment

1 Using the human figure as a starting point, try playing around with various poses cropped off in different ways. Draw small so you don't get tied down in details. The goal is to crank out a lot of thumbnails



in a short amount of time. You can get pose inspiration from reference image sites, photo shoots with friends and of course the trusty old mirror.

2 Draw shapes on different layers so you can move and scale them. Save a JPG every time you make a noticeable change, then look at all your images to see what stands out. Pay attention to where



shapes point, what's at the centre of your circles, and what the placement of your shapes emphasises. Direct the eye. Keep experimenting. Make lots of pots!

3 Like the figures and shapes, keep your colour palette simple. You don't have to use white for the skin (emulating Nagel), but try making things as compositionally exciting as possible with seven colours or



less. Use contrast to draw attention where you want it. Matching hues on the figure to those on the background can help make the two feel harmonious.

VIDEO AVAILABLE

QUESTION

How can I give my comic characters convincing body language?

Hamilton Maddock, US

ANSWER

Tom Foster replies



Good reference material is a must when you want to convey a specific emotion in your characters, but I often find it difficult to source pictures of people emoting convincingly. Stock photography is often very obviously staged and using myself as a model relies too heavily on my own, pitiful acting ability.

A few canny changes in my image search criteria can make all the difference. For example, footballers are almost always either wildly elated or incredibly angry. This affords a tremendous opportunity to the student of human behaviour, as photographs from football and other sporting events often provide a unique glimpse of raw, unfiltered emotion. For subtler expressions, I turn to screen actors. I try to think of a memorable performance that conveyed the emotion I'm trying to relate and seek out screenshots from that film, or pause the DVD, if I have it.

I try to track down at least two pictures of different people for each expression. I then look for the commonalities, to divine what is universal about how a certain emotion affects the face and body. Once I isolate those visual cues, I apply them to my character.



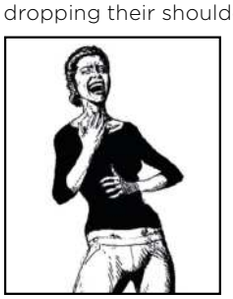
Your characters have a potentially limitless range as actors, but utilising it can require a bit of homework. I used seven photographs for reference here

STEP-BY-STEP: Conveying specific emotions

1 A tense person will be a little hunched and have uneven shoulders, because the body is gearing up to have to either protect itself or run. The jaw will usually be clenched and the eyes wide. I emphasise this by making the iris/pupil a little smaller. There might also be a hint of disgust in their expression, to suggest their sense of nauseous anxiety.

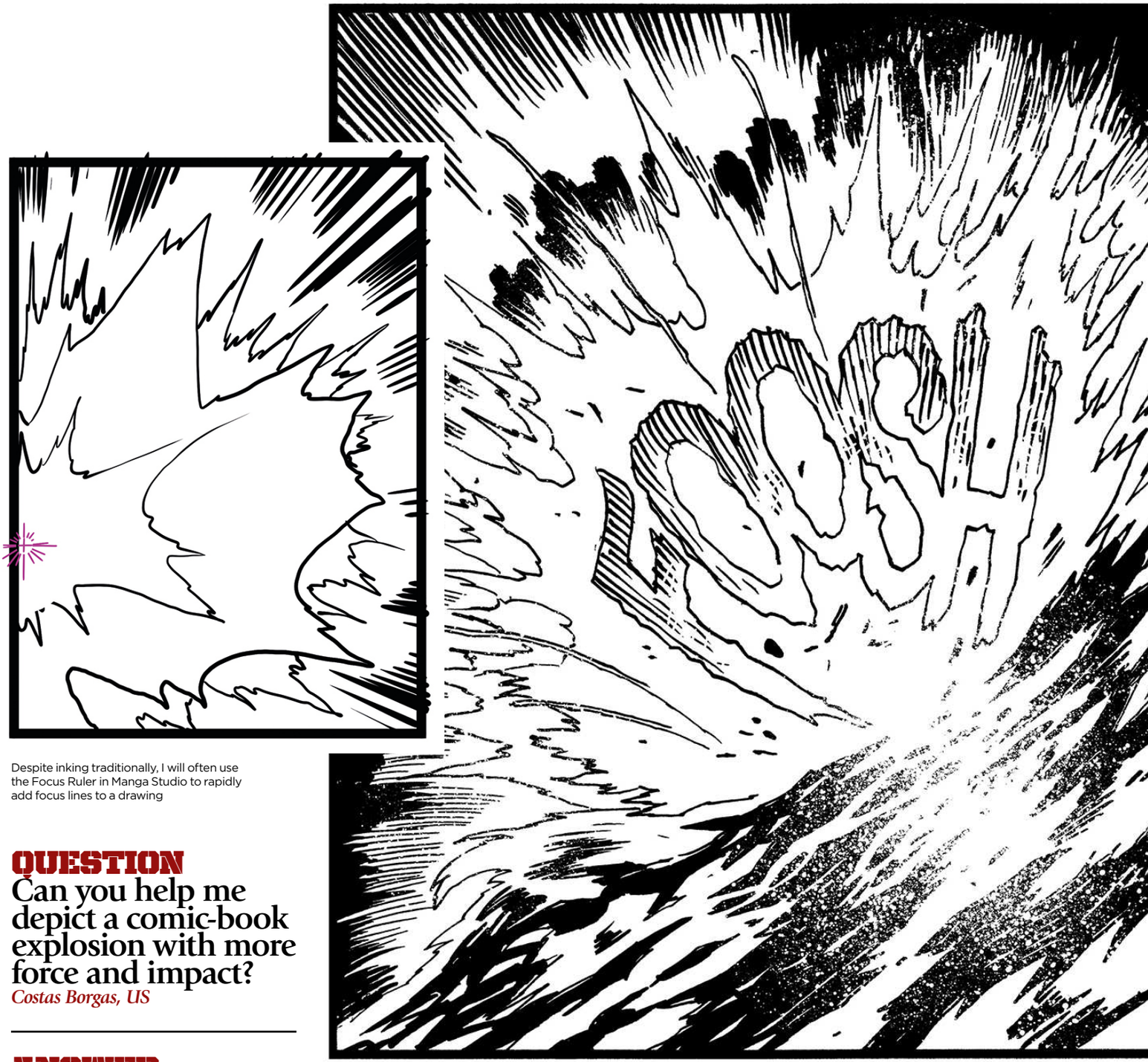


2 Laughter is often involuntary. While people in the throes of hilarity may open themselves up by leaning back and dropping their shoulders, the body will often sense its vulnerability and shield the face and vital organs with the hands. The nostrils will flare, the fat of the face converge around the eyes, and teeth and gums be on show.



3 When your character is exhibiting an aggressive emotion such as rage, the head and hands will typically be projected forward. Tendons and muscles will be tensed and the lips curled inward to bare the teeth – these are primal intimidation tactics. Be careful not to exaggerate the mouth too far, though: doing so can dehumanise the character.





Despite inking traditionally, I will often use the Focus Ruler in Manga Studio to rapidly add focus lines to a drawing

QUESTION

Can you help me depict a comic-book explosion with more force and impact?

Costas Borgas, US

ANSWER

PJ replies



Ideally you want an explosion to dominate the panel or page that you're drawing, and typically the explosion panel will be the largest on a page. Picking a zero point for the explosion (the point from which an explosion radiates outwards) on the bottom of the panel means you can have a large amount of space to show the energies bursting out. I'll radiate blast waves of power out from the zero point. These are my primary forces, helping me get a sense of the broad shape of the explosion. I'll add random arcs of debris shooting out beyond the limits of the blast. The arc gives the impression of movement and, importantly, shows the impact of gravity.

Behind these primary forces I'll add further zigzags of blast forces, weaved together more tightly. These secondary forces will help give a bit of dimensionality to the explosion. I'll start detailing here any clouds of ash that the explosion may be throwing off, too. Remember that everything is radiating out of the zero point. Usually I'll ink the forces with a pen so the details can be as tight as possible – the tighter these forces appear, the larger the sense of scale.

Finally, once I've done all this, I'll add some focus lines drawn from the panel borders pointing towards the blast radius. This will help make the explosion appear brighter.

Here I've added a little white digital splatter to add texture to the blast, and enhance the feel of a explosion taking place on the water

ARTIST'S SECRET

SOUND EFFECT LETTERING

With sound effects the letter shapes can be more important than the words. Here the explosion is preceded by the crackle from an energy weapon. I lettered the KA as sharp text, and THOOM! as contrasting styles to create visual interest.



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QUESTION

How can I make dynamic page layouts easy to follow?

Nathan Shannon, Canada



An increasingly varied page layout can help escalate tension and drama in a scene, but the action should still be clearly delineated

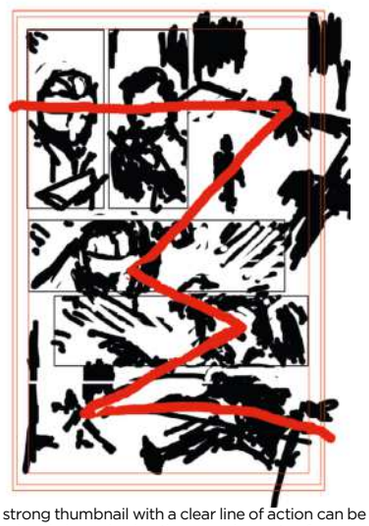
ANSWER

Tom Foster replies



Page layouts have a lot of influence over how a reader follows a story. Here I lay out a page detailing an escalating conflict. In the first two panels, there's only mild conflict, so I use straightforward angles and panel placement. But as things get more heated, I begin to drop or break panel borders, stagger panel placement and incorporate more dynamic angles and perspective. I use DAZ 3D to plan my panel compositions; manipulating the camera placement and focal length can create some dramatic effects that would be difficult to achieve using traditional methods.

I then use Photoshop to organise my DAZ renders. All the major compositional elements in each panel are placed to guide the reader from one panel to the next in sequence. The figures in panel 3 are shot from such an angle as to create an invisible diagonal line that leads from the upper figure, through the lower figure, through the left fist of the character in panel 4, right to the focal point of panel 4: the face of the charging character. I then guide the reader through the focal points of the following two panels in a similar way, using one continuous, zig-zagging line of action. This way the action can be dynamically staged, yet be clear and easy-to-follow for a reader.



A strong thumbnail with a clear line of action can be invaluable in anchoring the core elements of a page

ARTIST'S SECRET

LEADING THE EYE

Drawing an imaginary, or even literal, line through your layout to represent the path of the reader's eye across the page can be a great help in pulling all your major storytelling elements together, so that they flow smoothly.

QUESTION

My comic characters' faces lack variety – can you help?

Abi Thorne, England

VIDEO AVAILABLE



Emphasising different, key aspects of the face can create a variety of convincing characters, so long as the fundamentals of form and anatomy are maintained

ANSWER

Tom Foster replies



When drawing unusual or particularly characterful facial types, I find it important to have a strong understanding of the underlying anatomy, because my ability to convincingly exaggerate elements of this will govern the legitimacy of my characters. So I have reference material, such as anatomical diagrams, on hand to cover any of the gaps in my knowledge.

I look up images of celebrities whose faces seem to match the character type I'm aiming for most closely, and study the dominant shapes in their faces. However, I try not to base my design too closely on one person, as a noticeable resemblance to a familiar figure may bring the reader out of the fiction of the story and compromise the character's own unique identity. So I draw from elements of different sources, because noticing the commonalities and the differences in my chosen models helps me understand what the core elements that define the character are.

By building up enough knowledge of the foundations of facial geography, I can choose precisely which elements to keep generic and which to make distinct, to better define only the things about the character that I wish to communicate.


I use a bright, old-school colour palette to complement the clean line work and the fun subject matter

QUESTION

How can I achieve bold, timeless comics colours?

Jacquie Penn, England

VIDEO AVAILABLE

ANSWER

Tom Foster replies



Your choice of comics colours may look good on-screen but might print much muddier than you predicted. So I make most of my colour decisions based on specific ink values that I know will print well. Back in the old days of comics, colourists had a limited palette: initially 63, then later 124 colours, each of these colours consisting of a combination of cyan, magenta and yellow.

For this reason, I always keep track of the ink proportions I'm using by inputting my colour values numerically, using the CMYK sliders in Photoshop's Color panel (I always work in CMYK mode if the work is intended for print). I usually use multiples of five, so the basic flesh tone I used here equates to C=0, M=15, Y=20. Then I used direct multiples of that to add shading (for example, C=0, M=30, Y=40).

This leads to a very natural gradation of colour that seems rich and organic, even if it isn't photo-realistic. This system also helps you prevent black creeping into your colours, which will muddy them up and obscure the detail in the inks.

STEP-BY-STEP: Make your line work fly off the page



1 First I do my flatting. This is the process of filling in the basic areas of colour. I make sure every area is flush to the next, with no white between them, by working on a separate layer from the inks and using the Lasso tool with the Anti-alias option switched off.



2 I then rough in my areas of shadow on a separate layer (I always keep a layer of just the flat colours as this enables me to select areas easily with the Magic Wand). This gives me an idea of what the full colour palette will look like. It's a quick process that instantly adds dimension.



3 From here I render the colours, using the shadow colours with a lower Opacity brush to build them up. I'll also add a few highlights tones and texture details. I do a test printout of the finished version, because sometimes the screen will flatter the rendering a little.

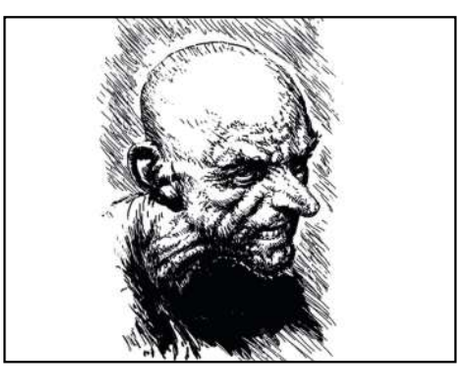
STEP-BY-STEP: Develop distinct facial types



1 When drawing a young, healthy character, knowledge of the basics of proportion is essential. I hint a little at the underlying muscle and bone structure, but primarily aim to achieve balance and subtlety. Too much of any one specific characteristic can be jarring for the viewer.



2 A fuller face can be a challenge because the bone structure and musculature are obscured by fatty masses, so anatomical diagrams may fall short. I use a fair bit of photo reference here to study how the fat around the jaw and cheeks alters the basic forms of the face.



3 For a wizened or gaunt face I will exaggerate the underlying bone and muscle structures, making use of anatomy diagrams as reference material. If I want to age the figure, looser skin around the jaw and neck and bags under the eyes help to lend authenticity to more obvious wrinkles.

QUESTION
How can I turn a flat figure pose into a dynamic one?

Jenine Woodhouse, Australia



Wonder Woman – or any heroic character – practically demands to be placed in a dynamic pose

Answer
Michelle replies



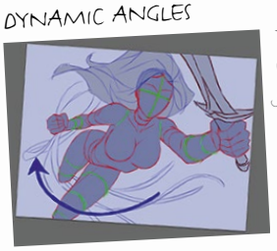
Dynamic poses are fun for the artist to create, exciting for the viewer, and can strengthen the story and composition of your illustration. Such poses are best achieved with loose gestural thumbnails or sketches, in which you can visualise the pose, angle and composition of the character.

During the initial sketch stage, a figure can become flat or stiff, taking away from the dynamic energy and storytelling that an artist wants to create. Some common pitfalls that can cause this include lack of depth, inaccurate perspective or foreshortening, a non-dynamic camera angle, and a pose that's not based on the beginning or the ending of an action – these always have the most impact.

You can turn a non-dynamic pose into a dynamic one by creating gestural thumbnails. Work on top of a chosen gestural thumbnail with cylinders, blocks, volumes and perspective, before fleshing out the final pose with lighting, rendering, detail and special effects.

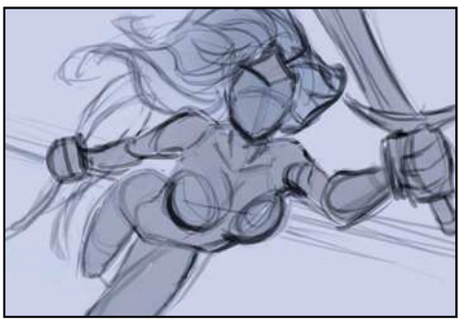
ARTIST'S SECRET

DYNAMIC ANGLES

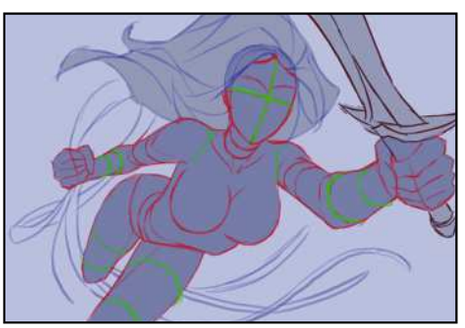


Tilt the pose to an off-balance angle to give it a sense of motion and visual punch. Rotating the camera and horizon line also adds to the dynamism of the pose and the composition.

STEP-BY-STEP:
Bring your characters to life



1 I create gestural pose thumbnails, thinking about what I want the figure to be doing, what angle I want them to be viewed from, and how I want them in the scene. I build upon the chosen sketch with volumes and forms, fleshing it out with cylinders and blocks to achieve the three-dimensional angles of the body parts.



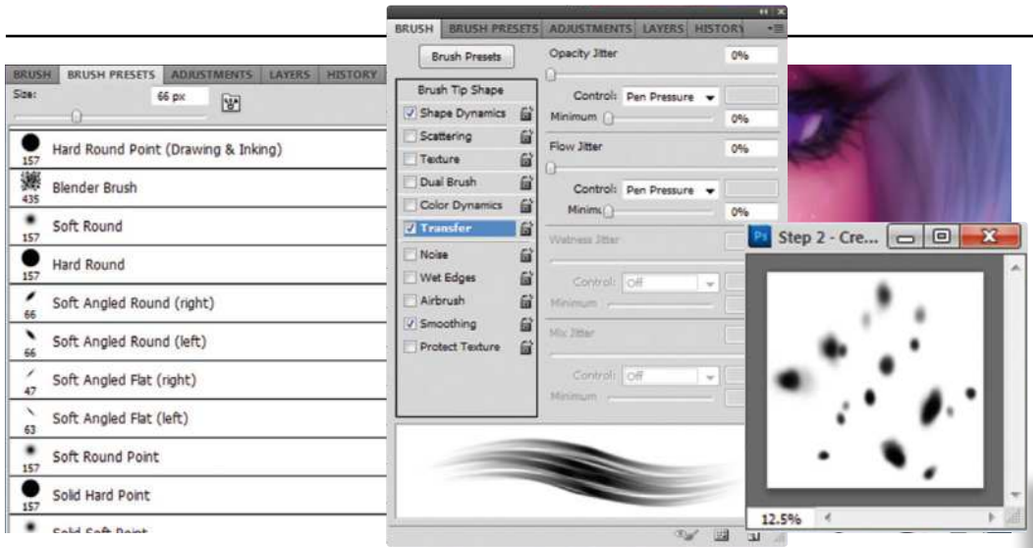
2 On a new layer, I build on top of the volumetric pose drawing with more detail, fleshing out the hand poses, clothing, dynamic hair groups and shapes, and dynamic accessories such as Wonder Woman's Lasso of Truth. I then clean up the detail drawing and prepare it for the painting phase and final adjustments.

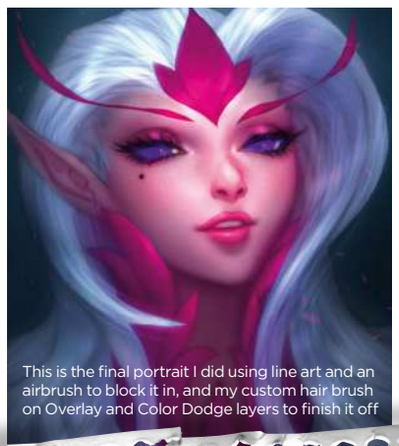


3 I block in the basic lighting with an airbrush, thinking about the volumes and how I want the lighting to affect them. Once I'm happy with this stage, I go in on top with more rendering and detail. When the rendering is finished, I add finishing effects such as motion blur to add extra motion and dynamism to the illustration.

QUESTION
Can you help me build up a library of custom Photoshop brushes?

Daisy Curtis, Canada





This is the final portrait I did using line art and an airbrush to block it in, and my custom hair brush on Overlay and Color Dodge layers to finish it off

ANSWER
Michelle replies



There are many free Photoshop brushes and textures online that an artist can download, which in many instances can be all an artist will need in their custom brush library. Yet creating custom brushes from your own photo textures or hand-painted samples can also come in handy if you want to create a specific effect that can help make your art unique.

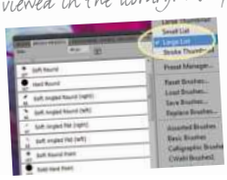
Here, I'm setting up a custom brush library, made up of custom and free stock brushes. I'm also creating and customising a hair brush to add to the library

You can build your own custom Photoshop brush library by collecting stock brushes from the web, creating your own brushes from scratch, editing pre-existing brushes that come with Photoshop, and organising your brushes into an easy-to-browse brush library. Here I'll explain how to create your own custom Photoshop brush library to help you save time creating awesome effects in your art.

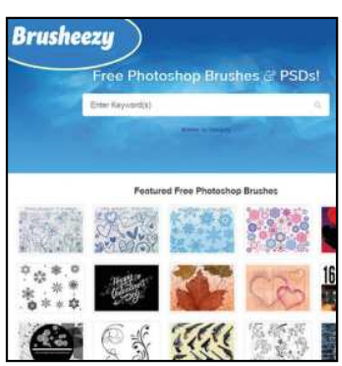
ARTIST'S SECRET

CUSTOMISE BRUSH LIBRARY VIEWS

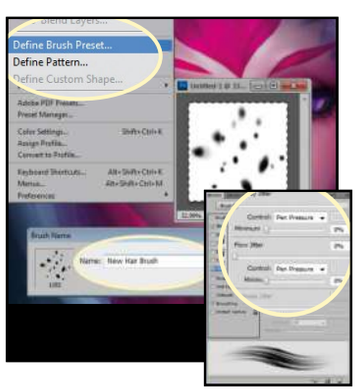
A great way to help you navigate your brush library is to customise how each brush is viewed in the library. For quick navigation of your brush library, you can switch the brush thumbnail view to small List or Large List.



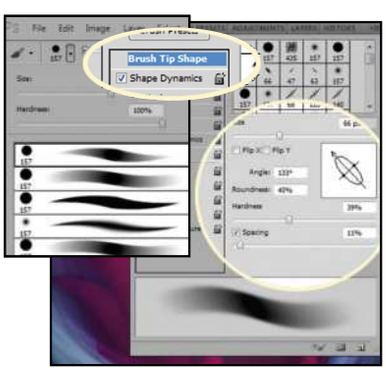
STEP-BY-STEP: Build your custom brush library



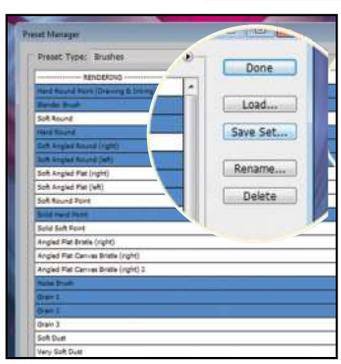
1 One quick way to collect a lot of useful Photoshop brushes is to download free stock ones from useful sites such as **brusheezy.com** and **myphotoshopbrushes.com**. These sites provide a wide variety of brushes and brush libraries with many different uses. When collecting brushes from the web, I select which brushes I want and create custom libraries with them.



2 To create custom brushes I take a photo or custom-painted shape or texture and convert it to black-and-white. Then I select it using the Rectangular Marquee tool and go to Edit>Define Brush Preset and give it a useful name that will enable me to find it easily. In the Brush window I can customise the brush's settings such as Shape Dynamics, Scattering, Texture and so on.



3 I also use Photoshop's default brushes that have extra useful customisable tip options. These can be changed dynamically with a stylus and hotkeys as I paint, such as the Hardness, Softness, Angle and Roundness. To customise a pre-existing Photoshop brush, I select it from the Brush Preset and adjust its properties in the Brush Tip Shape section of the Brush window.



4 To organise brushes into an easy-to-browse brush library, I open the Brush Presets window, click the icon in the upper-right corner and select Brush Preset Manager. From there I Ctrl-click to select each brush that I want to save into a new customised brush library and then click Save Set. I also add the name and edit the order of the brushes in the Brush Preset Manager.



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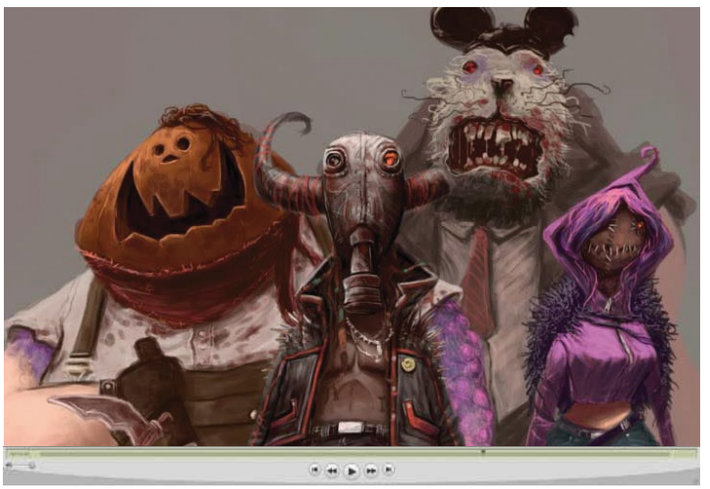
RESOURCES

To download your free resources, from how-to video tutorials to useful custom brushes, simply visit **https://bit.ly/2zd5wKD**



Add movement

Tony Foti explains how exaggeration can be used to add dynamism and energy to your reference-based drawings



Create great characters

Arthur Mask creates concept characters with varied body types tied together with style and colour



Dynamic Thor cover

Julian Totino Tedesco walks us through creating an image suitable for a comic book cover



Improve your design skills

Tony Foti demonstrates how stylisation and simplification can add verve and interest to your character artwork



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